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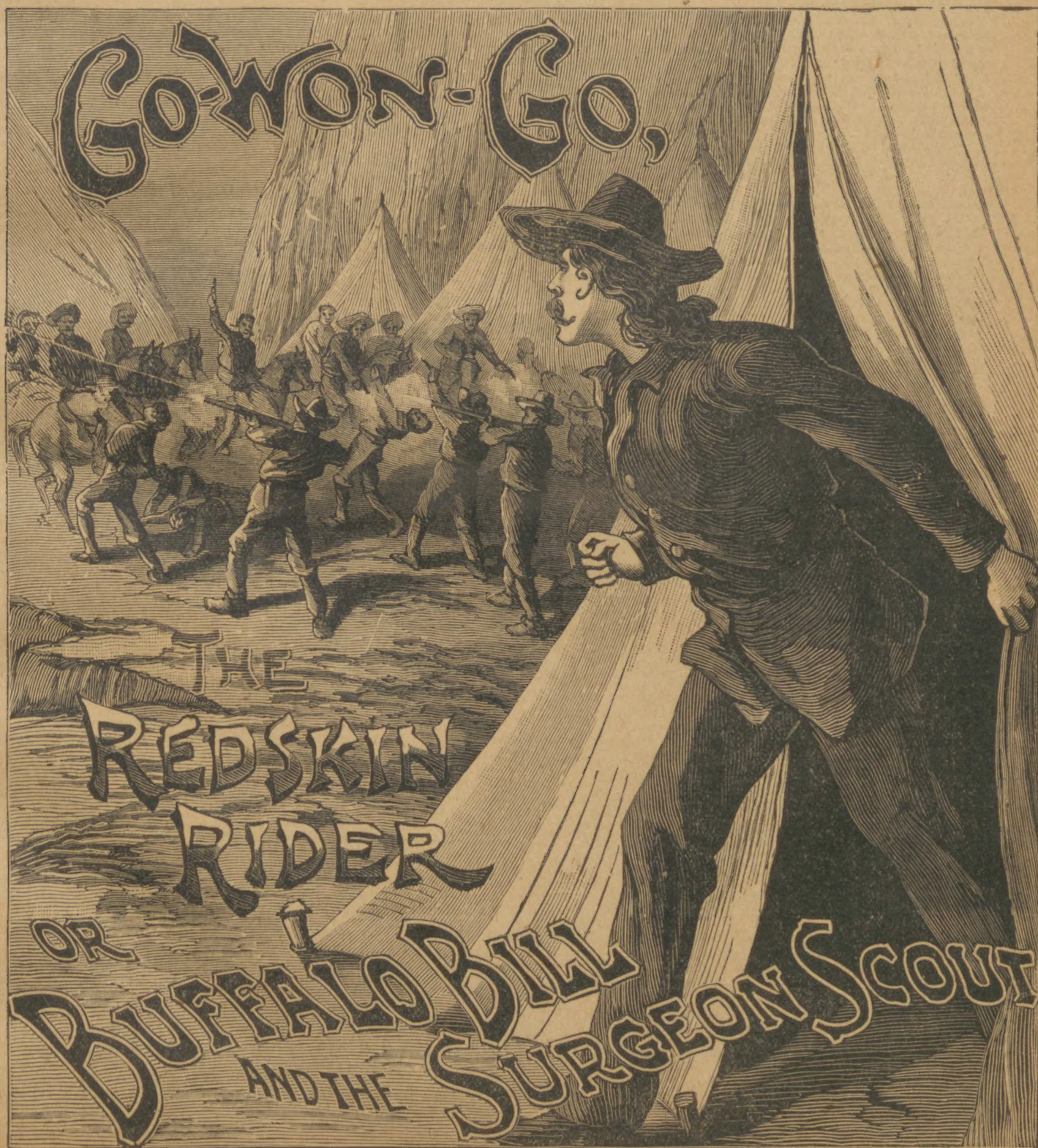
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"BY HEAVEN! THERE'S THAT YOUNG INDIAN RIDER, RED BUTTERFLY, WITH THE FORT SCOUTS!" CRIED THE OUTLAW CHIEF.

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Go-Won-Go,

THE RED-SKIN RIDER;

OR,

Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon-Scout.

A Romance of Living Heroes of Today, and Companion Story to "Red Butterfly."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAD MINER.

"MAD, or feigning madness, Miner Dan Darwin, if you do not lead me to the gold-mine I know you hold the secret of, I swear that to-morrow's sun shall set upon your grave. So make your decision!"

"The mine? Yes, it is rich with gold, so rich—The sunset? Yes, it is beautiful, so beautiful—The Grave? Yes, it is dark, so dark!"

"Curse you! will you betray your secret, or die?"

And the speaker leveled his revolver full in the face of the one he addressed.

It was a strange scene—a robber-camp, night, and in a canyon of the huge Rocky Range.

The outlaws were the border bandits, well known as the Red Buzzards of the Overland, and their chief, he who made the deadly threat, was a man of soldierly appearance, strikingly handsome as regarded fine features, but with a lurking devil in his eyes that only needed arousing to make him a fiend.

His form was tall, athletic and graceful, and he was attired in deep black, wore his hair long and shaded by a sombrero that sat jauntily on his head.

When attired for his lawless work he donned a red mask made to represent the head and beak of a buzzard; hence the name the road-agents had won along the frontier.

His retreat looked like a soldier camp, for he and his men lived in small "A" tents; his horses were staked in line, ready for instant use; every saddle and bridle was in place and military discipline ruled with an iron hand.

The one whom he addressed sat at the rustic table in his tent. He was, in person, of majestic mien, and wore a bandage about his head as though from a wound.

His hair and beard were tinged with gray, though he was by no means an old man.

Some great sorrow had brought the silver threads among his dark locks.

His face was noble in expression, yet peculiarly sad, and in his eyes dwelt a strangely-nervous, wandering look that showed lack of concentration of thought.

The revolver thrust into his face did not cause the demented miner to move a muscle of his features. He simply placed his elbows upon the table and leant his chin upon his hands, now seen to be manacled, gazing straight into the muzzle of the revolver held in the firm hand of the Red Buzzard chief.

"Will you give up your secret, or die, Yankee Dan?" again demanded Quantrel, savagely.

"The secret is locked here. I do not remember. All is dark here—no light—no memory," and he touched his forehead in a weary, pathetic way.

"You lie! you are feigning insanity. I will kill you!" yelled Quantrel.

And he seemed about to carry out his terrible threat, when suddenly wild yells without were heard, the trampling of hoofs and cracking of rifles and revolvers following.

"My God! that is Buffalo Bill's war-whoop! The Scout's League are upon my camp!" cried Quantrel, as he dashed from the tent, leaving the mad miner alone.

The scene that met his gaze was a startling one, for, by the glimmer of a dozen camp-fires aided by the flashes of rifles and revolvers, he saw that his camp was full of foes.

The retreat, in a canyon, with lofty walls of rock on either side, had been invaded from both entrance and exit.

Where he had deemed himself wholly safe, where he had believed no mortal man could find his hiding-place, he had been tracked by the Scouts' League, the bold band of Buckskin Trailers from Fort Venture, long miles away.

The chief, fearless though a hardened villain, stood like one dazed for a full minute. He saw before him, fighting back his followers, indifferent to death and great odds, men whose names had become historical.

The names fell from his lips one by one, as though he was calling the roll:

"Buffalo Bill, Night Hawk Powell, Wild Bill, Jack Crawford, Bony Ernest, Broncho Bill, Texas Jack, Tom Sun and—that infernal Patrol Parson of Miner's Roost—yes, and, by Heaven! there is that young Indian Rider, Red Butterfly,

also, with the Fort Scouts!" cried the outlaw chief.

"To fight these thunderbolts is useless; how to escape is the thing now!"

He had stood in the shelter of his tent calmly watching the scene. The scouts had thrown dry brush upon the fires, and the canyon was now lighted up with a red glare.

The keen eyes of the chief took in the situation, and he heard his men shouting:

"Quantrel!" "Chief!" "Chief!"

But, Quantrel knew that all was lost, so did not leap to the front, but dashed into his own tent adjoining that of the mad miner, seized from a small chest a pair of leather saddle-bags, rushed to where his own and other horses were staked in the shadow of the canyon cliffs, quickly severed the ropes of all of them, threw himself upon the back of a splendid black, and stampeding the already frightened animals with a wild yell, rushed down upon the fighting band of soldiers who had come up the canyon.

He knew better than to attempt to drive over the scouts, few in number though they were, who had so nearly forced their way to his tent.

The outlaws, fighting back the soldiers from cover, gave a wild cheer as they heard their chief's cry, and the soldiers broke momentarily under the stampede of the terror-stricken horses.

"Mount, men, and follow me!" shouted the chief.

A few obeyed, flinging themselves upon the horses as they went by.

And away these few dashed down the canyon, while behind them now rushed the victorious scouts, led by an Indian boy upon a pony that seemed fairly to fly over the rough trail.

"My God! we are lost!" cried one of the Buzzards, as he saw that a body of soldiers held the narrow pass around the cliff.

And death seemed before them, for the canyon ended abruptly in a cliff overhanging a rock-torn torrent many feet below.

In vain did the outlaws strive to check the maddened steeds they bestrode, but no human power could check that wild stampede.

Before them was the precipice. Upon their right, guarding the narrow shelf, the only pass, were the soldiers, behind them came the Scouts' League, Red Butterfly, the Indian Rider of the Overland, in the advance.

CHAPTER II.

QUANTREL'S VOW.

QUANTREL had planned his escape well.

He had taken in the situation, that the soldiers had come by the rocky shelf around the cliff, and, once riding over them, he could gain the fastnesses where no man could follow at night.

He had stampeded his horses, had driven over the soldiers like an avalanche, but, when triumph was seemingly before him, beheld that the cliff shelf of rock was guarded.

There stood a line of soldiers that could not be ridden down—a phalanx that could not be taken, while the Buzzards' horses, mad with terror, were dashing headlong to the destruction of themselves and their riders.

A volley from the soldiers maddened the animals the more, and another moment would tell the story.

It did do so! The cavalcade dashed over the precipice into the rock-broken torrent far below!

For none—horse or horseman—was there an atom of hope for escape.

But Quantrel had thought with the rapidity of lightning. He was not a man to die when there was a straw of hope to cling to. That straw, frail though it was, he beheld and grasped at.

He was on the side furthest from the soldiers, nearest the rocky wall of the narrow canyon cleft.

The wall was covered with a growth of scrub trees and vines, clinging in the crevices of the rocks.

This was his chance and he took it.

He dropped from his horse, sprung to the side of the canyon, and while the eyes of the horrified soldiers were upon the cavalcade dashing over to death, he climbed upward to the shelter of a clinging pine and there sat in hiding—trembling, almost unnerved, but safe.

The cold sweat of terror dropped from his face and hands, and every nerve in his body quivered, for never before in life had he looked death so squarely in the face.

His escape against such odds it was that unstrung every nerve and sinew, and he could hardly hold on to the tree that sheltered him.

He heard the wild shrieks of his Buzzards, the neighing or agony cries of the doomed horses, the plunge into the torrent, the crushing and crunching of bones and flesh upon the ragged rocks below; and, though it was night, he seemed to see it all and closed his eyes to shut out the sight—yet still he saw.

The soldiers stood like men paralyzed, and the pursuing scouts drew rein ere they reached that awful brink.

The outlaw band had been driven to its doom, a terrible doom indeed, and the Death Trackers made the canyon echo with their shouts.

Within a few feet of him, the quivering out-

law captain saw the invincible chief of the Scouts' League—Buffalo Bill, and almost at his side paused the mysterious Red-Skin Rider of the Overland, a youth who seemingly bore a charmed life.

But, in a moment, the Red Rider put spurs to his horse and flew back up the canyon, the others following, and only the soldiers remained to guard the pass.

Oh, would they never go!

If daylight came and they still remained they would discover the Buzzard in his hiding-place, and again the tremors of a deadly fear came over the lone outlaw—not so much the fear of death itself, but, because to die then meant the end of all his plans of revenge, his hope of a life of luxury, with riches untold at his command, in a land where he was not known.

Soon up the valley came the clear notes of a bugle sounding a recall, at which the blue-coats from the fort broke into a cheer, and then away they went up the canyon.

As the last one disappeared from sight the outlaw chief could hardly restrain himself from uttering a wild shout of joy.

But he did keep his lips close-sealed, and slipping down from his perch, ran like a deer around the shelf trail, until he found a break in the wall of the cliff into which he darted.

He did not stop there, but went on, on, up into the higher fastnesses of the big hills until he dropped down from sheer fatigue.

Slumber came to him almost at once, and it was long before he awoke.

Then he sprung to his feet with a start. The sun had traveled two-thirds its daily run, and it was some minutes before the hunted man could collect his thoughts.

Then came to him the scene of the night in all its horrors.

"Yes, the Red Buzzards are wiped out utterly, and I, Kit Quantrel, their chief, am dead!" broke in a hoarse voice from the outlaw's lips as he stood there in his hiding-place upon the mountain-top.

"Yes, I am dead, and I am so set down by Buffalo Bill and his scouts, for did they not see me die?"

"They all think they did. Every man of them, the Indian Rider and all, would take oath to it upon the Bible that they saw Quantrel leap to his doom!"

"So be it, and so it pleases me. Kit Quantrel is dead, yes, but I am left to avenge him!"

And the outlaw laughed grimly at his own conceit of avenging himself.

Without food, or blanket, or horse, and alone—with only a revolver in his belt, he was in a sad plight in those lonely wilds.

He had lost the saddle-bags he had taken from the tent, for they had gone over the precipice with the horse he rode; but in that supreme moment he had not thought of the small fortune they held.

Life remained! That was enough.

But he was not wholly penniless and helpless, for he took from beneath his hunting-jacket a belt of buckskin which seemed heavy.

"This is my fortune now. A paltry few hundreds in gold, and my life, to start anew with:

"What better foundation need I have?"

"Now to see if those human coyotes have left a morsel of food, or stray horse, or blanket, or anything behind save graves or the unburied corpses of my Buzzards."

He made his way along the ridge for several miles, wending his steps as though he knew the ground, and at last came to a point that looked down upon his camp.

All was desolation there, and a few coyotes clawing at some new-made graves told him that the foe had gone.

Up in the canyon he beheld, to his joy, a horse feeding, saddled and bridled!

"Some soldier's horse that escaped him," he said gleefully, and he made his way down into the canyon, captured the horse, found a haversack of provisions, a carbine and blankets strapped to the saddle and cried aloud:

"I'm in luck once more! this horse is the forerunner of a new fortune!"

"These are the graves of my brave men, and above them I vow to avenge myself upon those who have robbed me of men and gold and life—ha-ha! of life!"

And mounting, as the shadows began to deepen into twilight, the outlaw chief started upon his trail for new life and vengeance!

CHAPTER III.

BACK FROM THE PAST.

In an elegant home of the great City of New York, dwelt a woman whose beauty of face and form, whose accomplishments and riches made her a belle even in the metropolis so crowded with beautiful women.

She was dressing for a grand ball at the Academy of Music, where her name was upon the list of "Lady Managers," and upon her lovely face rested a look of half-anger, half-worry.

The cause was that her superb dress had not come home complete from the modiste's, and her maid had been dispatched at once in the madam's coupé to fetch it.

The home of the modiste was far away, and

an hour must elapse ere the maid could return, if not longer, and madam had given herself just so long to make her toilet and not be late.

Her home was in the upper part of the city, with extensive grounds about it for the metropolis, where land was valued by the square inch, and her suite of rooms overlooked the Hudson River.

It was a perfect moonlight night, and with her wrapper thrown on while waiting, the lady had walked to the window and stood gazing out upon the scene that was so beautiful under a full May moon.

Up to the shore, where her grounds touched the river, ran a sail-boat, and a man sprung out and advanced toward the mansion.

The lady was surprised, and watched his movements with interest.

He ascended the steps to the front door, and she waited for the servant to soon come with a message for her, as her husband was to meet her in the city, where she was to stop for him at his club on her way to the ball.

A low knock came at the door, and in answer to her response to enter, she beheld a tall form, with heavily-bearded face and the air of a gentleman.

It was the one whom she had seen land from the sail-boat.

An exclamation of fear and indignation sprung to her lips, and she said:

"Sir, who are you that you dare intrude here into my presence?"

"Don't get dramatic, Lucita, at sight of your brother, so long parted from you," was the answer, and turning the key in the door, he threw himself into any easy-chair.

The woman gave a start, and exclaimed: "No, you are no brother of mine, Frank Courtney, for—"

"Sh! don't breathe my name so loud, for do you not know that there is a market price on my head, or rather neck?"

"I know that you are a fugitive from justice, ay, from the gallows— God forgive me, but I had almost hoped that you were dead."

"No such luck—for you, sister mine! No, I am alive and enjoying perfect health, but my pocket just now is about empty, so I came to you to get money."

"Frank Courtney, you forfeited all claim upon me when you dishonored your name, years ago."

"Fool that I was, I sacrificed myself to please you—yes, and my parents."

"I was literally sold to the man whose name I bear and who knew that he bought me, for I told him I did not love him and never could learn to do so, and yet he took me upon those terms."

"My poor, misguided parents are dead now, and you, my wicked brother, wear the brand of Cain upon your brow. I helped you, gave you gold, and hoped to redeem you from your sinful life; but in vain, for you only went the more rapidly to your ruin, and I believed and hoped you would never cross my path again."

"Yet now you reappear, and come to ask for money."

The woman spoke in a low, earnest tone that showed how deeply she was moved by the presence of the man before her, in whose veins flowed her kindred blood.

He was not touched by her words, but, instead, laughed in a sneering way as he replied:

"I did not expect to worry you again nor disgrace you with my presence, Lucita, for I have been doing well, financially, in a land far from this."

"I am glad to hear this at least, for I wish you no harm, Frank, that you well know."

"But, sister mine, financial reverses overtook me. I lost all my earnings except enough to live on until I could grow a full beard and venture here to see you."

"You gambled your money away."

"Oh, no; I got my money in a more exciting way than winning at the card-table, for I won it on the Overland Trails and in the gold-mines by a 'Stand and Deliver' game that raked me in the shekels in quantity."

"A highwayman—you?"

"We call gentlemen of my profession out on the frontier, road-agents—toll-takers—not highwaymen."

"But robbers and murderers all the same."

"Oh, yes, certainly; that is one of the little peculiarities of the profession, you know."

"And so you dishonor your name by being all that is so wicked and detestable?"

"Oh, no, for I am not known as Frank Courtney, Lucita, but as Kit Quantrel, chief of the Red Buzzards of the Overland, of whom you may have heard."

"Alas, yes; and of him only that which is most sinful and cruel."

"I killed a man who, when dying, told me his name was Kit Quantrel, and left me his heir, though unwillingly, I admit."

"I liked his name and adopted it, and so no one knows that I am Frank Courtney, any more than they know you, Mrs. Baxter Dillingham, as the sister of Frank Courtney, the forger, card-sharp and murderer, alias Kit Quantrel, chief of the Red Buzzards."

"But my enemies wiped out my band of fol-

lowers completely, and as they supposed, had also killed their chief, so Kit Quantrel being to all intents and purposes dead, I shall adopt another name now."

"But, to the point of my story: I came here for gold, Lucita."

"You will get none from me, sir."

"Won't I?"

"You will not; and more: I wish to know how you gained entrance to my home?"

"Well, to be frank with you, sister mine, you discharged a trusted servant some weeks ago for drunkenness. It was I who drugged him, and so led him astray. But you got another butler, who is in my pay, so he let me in to-night, and he goes with me when I go, of course."

"Now I need money, and if you will give me what I ask, never again will I come to you more, and I will never cross your path in life, I promise you."

"I have a scheme on hand to kidnap a Western miner, now in an asylum, and if I do, then I believe I shall come in possession of a gold-mine that will make me a millionaire over and over again—a veritable bonanza king."

"But I have not fifty dollars now to my name, and it will take thousands to carry out my plot, so I must have the money. This is the situation in a nutshell, and you are to give me just twenty thousand dollars, do you see?"

"No, I do not see, and I will not give you a dollar," was the firm response of the beautiful woman, who had now turned at bay against her wicked brother.

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUTY UNADORNED.

THE man who so boldly had confessed his wickedness seemed to be a trifle nonplused at the stand taken by his sister not to aid him.

She had helped him, time and again, under pledges from him, and each time he had broken all promises until patience ceased to be a virtue.

Dearly had she loved this wicked brother, and yet he had brought only deep sorrow upon her.

It was his act which had separated her from the man she loved, and laid the plot for her to marry the one whose wife she then was, and who was a millionaire, clever and proud of his young and beautiful wife.

The one whom she had loved she had known as a poor young bachelor farmer, living upon the shores of Lake George, and he, when her brother and herself, out sailing together, had been capsized in a sudden storm, swam out and rescued her, then swam back again and saved the life of the youth, who, when a man, deliberately turned against his rescuer to literally sell his sister to a rich merchant for his own selfish and heartless ends.

The blow had fallen heavily upon Daniel Darwin, the young farmer, for he had gone West, feeling his poverty, to make a fortune for the woman he loved, and returning successful, had found her the wife of another.

But the evil career of Frank Courtney had soon driven him a fugitive from justice, and now he came back self-confessed of all that was bad, and demanded money of the sister whose life he had so cruelly shadowed.

"You do not mean that you intend to refuse me, Mrs. Dillingham?" he said, with an evil glitter in his eyes.

"I do."

"You will not give me money?"

"I will not."

"Well, I happen to know that you are famous for having the most beautiful jewelry of any of the aristocratic ladies of the city, so if I cannot get gold, you must give me that which will bring money."

"I will give you nothing, Frank, so it is useless to ask, and as I expect my maid soon, go before she returns and recognizes you."

"Is it Jule?"

"Yes, and you know she has hated you ever since you were a boy and treated her so cruelly."

"She will betray you against all my entreaties for her not to do so, for she has made a vow that she would, as I know."

"Then I had better be off, for I did not know that you still had that tigress as your maid. Give me what I ask and let me go."

"I will not give you one dollar, sir."

"Well, I see that you indeed have beautiful jewels—yes, most costly ones. You did not know which you would wear to the ball to-night, so laid them all out to see which would become you most with that exquisite dress, that must have cost several hundred at least."

"Now, I fancy these diamonds, as they are of the most value; yet this set of rubies, and this of emeralds are very beautiful."

"Pearls are pretty, yes, but not one-fourth the value of the other three sets."

"Why, there are necklaces with each set, I see, and at a quick estimate, I value the lot at thirty thousand dollars."

"Will you put those jewels down, Frank Courtney, and leave this room and house?"

"Give me the gold I ask and I am off, sister mine!"

"I will not," was the fearless reply.

"Then I take these," and, quick as a profes-

sional pickpocket could have done, he seized and concealed the four sets of jewelry.

Mrs. Dillingham uttered a cry of alarm and sorrow commingled, while she said:

"Frank Courtney, would you rob your own sister?"

"Oh, yes, why not? Give me the value of them in gold and I'll return them."

"I have but a couple of thousand dollars with me, given me yesterday to pay some bills. I will give you that."

"Write me a check for what I ask."

"I keep no account, sir, for my husband gives me all I wish."

"Then give me what you have."

She opened a bureau draw and took out a roll of bank-notes.

"Here is the money, so give me back my jewels, and, Frank Courtney, never let me see your face again, for—"

"Well?"

"If I do, so help me Heaven! I will bear all shame and send you to prison, and well you know that it means the gallows for you."

The man's face darkened; then he laughed in a coarse way, and said:

"Those words have cost you dear, sister mine, for I shall take your jewels and the money, too. Good-by," and he moved toward the door.

She uttered a cry, and springing toward him, grasped his arm.

But he seized her in his strong grasp and hurled her with stunning force to the floor, while he sprung to the door and fled.

Ten minutes after Jule, the maid, drove up to the door, sprung out of the carriage, and dashed up to the room of her mistress with the missing part of the dress in her arms.

She beheld Mrs. Dillingham seated upon the floor, very white and scared-looking, and seemingly dazed.

With a cry of alarm Jule sprung toward her, and then came the words:

"Go and alarm the coachman and other servants! Have the butler arrested, for I have been robbed of my jewels and my money, Jule!"

The maid darted away to obey, and found that the butler was not in his accustomed place.

Soon the servants were aroused, but the butler was not to be found, and, glancing out upon the river, Lucita Dillingham saw the sail-boat gliding swiftly away, and knew that she could send pursuit and overtake the little craft.

But she said nothing of the boat, and murmured to herself:

"No, no! he would but die on the gallows. Let him go, for not mine must be the hand to bring him to punishment."

The boat had been seen by the maid and the coachman, when they came back from the errand to town, but before, in their alarm, they recalled the fact, it was out of sight.

And so the beautiful woman finished her toilet, and, without a jewel upon her—only her wedding-ring—drove away to attend the ball.

Her heart was aching, yet she could not refuse to go, and, though there were other jewels she could have worn, she would not put them on.

So with her beauty unadorned Mrs. Baxter Dillingham went to the ball, and all who saw her wondered that she wore no jewelry, yet were compelled to admit that she outshone those who were gleaming with precious gems.

No one of all that gay assemblage suspected the skeleton that night finding a resting-place in the heart of the lovely woman.

CHAPTER V.

KIDNAPPING A MADMAN.

IN a large private Institution for the Insane not many miles from the city of New York, a man was pacing to and fro in a comfortably-furnished room, looking out now and then upon the scenery spread out before him.

He was a person of striking presence, the same one whom the reader beheld in the tent of Quantrel, the outlaw chief, far away on the frontier.

He it was who had looked calmly into the muzzle of the outlaw's revolver and refused to divulge the secret of where his gold-mine was located, or could not do so with his feeble intellect.

About him was an air of comfort, showing that some one kindly cared for the madman, and his face was as placid as though he held no care.

He gazed listlessly at a carriage that drove up to the door of the institution and beheld two men alight with a look that showed no interest in them or their coming.

One of these visitors sent his name to the physician in charge, and that personage soon appeared.

"I am glad to see you, Doctor Wilber," said the superintendent, and the one he addressed handed him a letter which he read aloud, as follows:

"MY DEAR DOCTOR DUNN:—"

"It has been decided by the friends of your patient, Daniel Darwin, that an operation should be performed upon him, to see if the pressure of the bone upon the brain cannot be removed, thus restoring his reason."

"I favor the idea, and have been selected as the one to perform the operation, so have fitted up quarters in my own house for the patient, as my time is too occupied for me to come to him.

"Doctor Wilber, who bears this letter, will bring Mr. Darwin to me, and he is accompanied by a companion in case the patient should be violent or troublesome.

"It will be several days before I can get at the work, but I hope to inform you of the success of the operation within a week.

"Doctor Wilber is authorized to pay any bills now due.

With respect,

"SAYRES MOTT, M. D."

"I sincerely hope, Doctor Wilber, that this unfortunate man can be cured, for I never had a patient to whom I became more attached, and his case is, I have heard, a very unfortunate one, as he was a miner, with the knowledge of a very rich mine in his possession, and wounded in the head, his reason was destroyed," said the superintendent.

"Yes, Doctor Dunn, his case is a sad one; but if any one can cure him it will be Doctor Sayres Mott."

"Very true, and I shall hope for the best."

"Is he violent at all, sir?"

"Not in the least; he obeys like a child."

"I am glad of that, sir," said Doctor Wilber, and then he asked for the amount due to date for the care of the patient.

The bill was made out, and paid, and the patient sent for, along with his baggage.

Darwin bowed mechanically, when the superintendent introduced him to Doctor Wilber, and then said in a pleading tone:

"Don't let me go."

"It is for your good, Mr. Darwin."

"No, he will kill me!"

"On the contrary, Mr. Darwin, I will take you to one who will restore you to health."

"Don't let me go!" pleaded the madman.

The superintendent looked puzzled.

"I never saw him resist before, for it is not his nature," he observed.

"He will be all right when he sees I am his friend," Doctor Wilber responded, and again came the plaintive appeal:

"Please don't let me go! He will kill me!"

But, Doctor Wilber was firm, the superintendent equally so, and the demented man was led to the carriage, the same pleading words upon his lips.

Away rolled the carriage and it drove to a town on the Hudson River, where the steamer was caught by the two men and their patient.

But the steamer was an upward-bound boat, and not one on its run to the city, whither the carriage drove after getting rid of its passengers.

"You have decided not to have the operation performed then, sir?" asked the attendant of Doctor Wilber, as they went into a state-room on the boat with their charge.

"Yes, for it would be taking too great chances."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I believe that the operation will restore the man's reason, and I at first intended to have it done by Doctor Mott; but, upon second thought, I fear that the patient might be visited at the asylum and his absence discovered, and then all would be known and I would be foiled in my attempt."

"So, the best thing for us to do is to get to the far West with all speed, and once there I know of a surgeon who has performed wonders, and he shall do the work."

"I think you are wise, sir, for the act we have done would land us in prison," the attendant responded.

"Yes, more than that—for me," was the answer of Doctor Wilber, but he did not utter the two last words aloud.

It was evident that Doctor Wilber was a shrewd manager, for he did not go on to Albany in that steamer.

The private asylum from whence he had taken Darwin was upon the East River, and yet the doctor had driven across to the North River and caught the day boat at Yonkers.

Then he had landed at Newburg, and there had taken the train for Graycourt, where he caught the Night Express for the West.

"If we are discovered to have kidnapped the man, Jenks, the carriage may be tracked to Yonkers and the boat. Then the telegraph will go to Albany to head us off on the arrival of the steamer this evening, and before we can be tracked we will be far on our way to the West, and by changing trains, disguising ourselves and our man, and you not seeming to be in my company, so as to be trailed as three men, you see we can throw off all pursuit. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I see that you are a remarkable man," was the honest response of Jenks, who gazed admiringly upon his companion.

"Wait until you know me better, Jenks, then decide."

"I have seen enough already, sir, for you aided me to escape from prison, as an old friend you had known in the past, and you know it was a life sentence with me."

"Yes, I know, Jenks, and you ought to have been hanged, and I guess, if we are caught, you will be," complacently assured the doctor.

"Heaven forbid, sir; but then, you got me a place as butler, and certainly worked it well, to rob the house of what you did. Then you planned the cleverest kidnapping scheme on record, and tell me that I am to be your partner in the results."

"So I said, Jenks, and so I mean. But, we must reach the frontier first, and be careful to make no slip to betray me. This man, Daniel Darwin, holds a secret which I must know, but there are those who will track us to the gallows once they strike our trail, as I well know," and Quantrel, the outlaw chief, for he was the pretended "Doctor Wilber," changed color as he thought of Buffalo Bill and the Scouts' League.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SCOUTS' VICTORY.

THAT the outlaw chief, Quantrel, and his men, had been rushed to their doom over the cliff at the end of the canyon, not a man of the attacking force upon the camp of the road-agents doubted.

The plan to carry the camp had been a good one, and plotted by two persons—one of whom was a man known in the mining-camps, and on the frontier, as "Parson Prim."

He had come to the camp of Miner's Roost, from whence no one knew, and had set about the very difficult task of reforming the wild spirits of the border.

He had never been suspected of carrying a weapon until occasion demanded the use of one; then he was discovered to be "well heeled."

A dead shot he certainly was, and a superb horseman, as well.

He talked, rather than preached to the boys, sung well and knew any number of sweet airs which, set to hymns, went straight to the heart.

He dressed always in black, with top-boots and a slouch hat; went as clean-shaven as a priest, wore his hair long, and looked at the world through a large pair of green gold-rimmed spectacles, which indicated that he had weak eyes.

He had shown a nerve in many cases when he had the drop on the other fellow, and when bantered for a game of cards usually raked in the winnings.

He went his way alone through the mountains, dwelt in a cabin on a mountain-spur overlooking Miner's Roost, and was admired, feared and a mystery to the miners, while the evil-doers, whose name was legion in those remote camps, dreaded any contact with him.

He did pretty much as he pleased, without fear or favor—was the friend of those in distress, the foe of the bravo, and had shown himself as much a master-surgeon and physician as he was of revolver, saddle-horse and psalm-singing.

Such was Parson Prim, who had been one of the trailers to run down the Red Buzzards of the Rockies, as the outlaws had been pleased to call themselves.

But there was another trailer as tireless and determined as was the parson.

This one also was a mystery upon the plains.

It was an Indian youth of about seventeen or eighteen, slender in form, yet wiry, strong as a young Hercules, and as quick in his movements and as graceful as a panther.

His face was a study in the perfection of its features, and its beauty.

Feminine it looked, and yet there was all in it to make up a splendid manhood.

His eyes were large, expressive, full of an intensity which burst forth into fire, it seemed, when aroused.

His teeth were a marvel of evenness, whiteness and beauty, and his hair, worn down his back, was black as night and waving.

He dressed in buckskin, embroidered with quills and beads of various colors, fringed along the seams, and the leggings were stuck in high-top cavalry boots.

His movements were rapid and decided, and absolutely he knew nothing of fear or irresolution.

He had appeared upon the border and volunteered for the post of Pony Rider from Fort Venture to a station on the Overland, though rider after rider had been killed on the run.

He had been given the post of peril, which, to the amazement of all, he rode without being killed or wounded, as had been predicted upon his very first trip through, he would be.

He was known as Go-won-go, the Red Butterfly, for upon his slouch hat was embroidered in velvet and gold a red butterfly.

His weapons were of the best—his horses unequalled, and he had at once jumped into fame as Red Butterfly, the Indian Rider of the Overland.

It was said that he had saved Parson Prim once from assassination, and certain it was that the two became the best of pals.

And more, these two had plotted together to track the Red Buzzards to their mountain roost.

In this laudable undertaking they had as allies Sunset Sam Busby, the driver of the Overland, who took the coach through as far as Jumping Off City on Red Butterfly's run, and the Scouts' League, a band of Braves in Buckskin under Buffalo Bill, numbering men whose names are historical to-day as heroes of the plains.

Then there was also a gallant young army-officer, Lieutenant Andrew Ames, of the —th Cavalry, stationed at Fort Venture, at that time.

The trap had been set, and the roost of the Red Buzzards had been attacked by night under the guidance of Red Butterfly, who seemed to know the country strangely well for an Indian who claimed to have been reared in the East, though a Mohawk-Sioux.

The driving over the cliff of the outlaws had been the culmination of the victory of the attacking scouts and soldiers, and they all sought to see what the result had been.

There was the tent of the chief, and another full of his personal possessions.

There were the tents of the men, the horses concealed here and there, and plunder in vast quantities, the result of many raids upon the settlements, mining-camps and coaches of the Overland.

Next to the tent of the outlaw chief was one in which sat a man at a table on which stood a candle.

He was ironed hands and feet, and was calmly gazing out upon the scene—the canyon dotted with dead and dying men, and the victors moving about among the spoils of victory.

He seemed unmoved, unaffected by the incidents of the night—wholly so, for it was the mad miner, whose secret Quantrel had not forced from him.

Hardly had the outlaw cavalcade ridden to doom over the cliff to the rocky torrent below when a horseman came dashing up the canyon, and, halting suddenly before the tent where still sat the madman, threw himself from his horse and entered.

It was Red Butterfly—and springing to the side of the madman, he cried, in a voice that quivered with emotion:

"Thank God! my father, I have found you at last!"

The poor man looked at him wholly undisturbed and said, passively:

"Who are you? I don't know you."

"Great God! he does not know me—he is mad!" cried the Red Butterfly, in a tone of deepest grief.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RED BUTTERFLY.

"No, I do not know you," was the response of the mad miner.

"But I am Go-won-go, your child, my father."

"No, I never had a wife. The woman I loved deceived me and married a rich man. I never had a child," was the low response.

"Well, you shall have a child now, one who will devote a life-service to you."

"Come! let me get off these dreadful irons, for you are free now, and we will go far from here where your health will be restored, and you will be happy, away yonder in the old home upon Lake George!"

Just then Parson Prim rode up in the early dawn, and the Red Pony Rider said, while his lips quivered:

"He does not know me, sir."

"I feared that it would be so, but we can hope that his reason will return in time. Let us set him free from these irons. The manacle keys, I suppose, will be found in the chief's tent next to this."

"I will search for them; but I fear my revenge is not complete."

"How so, Go-won-go?"

"I wished to see that man Quantrel hanged," was the response, in fierce tones.

"Yet his fate was an awful one, and he had time to think over his past evil life and suffer ere he went to his death."

"You saw him go over, sir?"

"I saw the whole herd dash over, as you did."

"I beheld him among the number, yet it seemed to me that he disappeared before the edge of the cliff was reached."

"It was your imagination, for he could not escape the doom of all. I only regret the poor horses that rushed down to their death."

"Well, I wish I could get the idea out of my mind that Quantrel did not die; but it is foolish to think so, is it not, parson?"

"I believe there is no doubt of his death."

"Well, now see if my poor father will recognize you—you who were so kind to him."

The parson stepped forward, and said:

"Well, Yankee Dan, I am glad to meet you again. I hope you have improved since the outlaws kidnapped you from my cabin at Miner's Roost. We have rescued you, you see."

"I do not know," was the reply.

"Oh, yes, you are safe now, and Red Butterfly, your son, is looking for the keys to free you of them irons."

"I do not know," was the same plaintive response of the demented man.

Just then the Indian youth entered with the keys, and quickly the mad miner was relieved of the manacles.

But he seemed not to care for his release, and simply stood still, gazing listlessly out upon the scene before him.

"I fear his reason is irrevocably gone," remarked the Red Rider, sadly.

"Let us hope not, and I believe, if you take him home, as you said you intended to do, all will come right in the end."

"Oh, I hope so!" was the reply.

The Red Rider remained by the side of the mad miner, while the parson joined the scouts, who were now moving about the outlaw camp.

The soldiers were gathering up the dead for burial and taking the wounded to the shelter of some trees, where the surgeon was awaiting them.

Advancing toward the young Indian Rider, a handsome, dashing young officer said:

"We owe this splendid victory to you, Red Butterfly—to you and Parson Prim."

"I did but my duty, sir, and my aim was to rescue this poor man, whose reason is so irrevocably gone that he does not know me."

"Parson Prim is the one to give the greater credit to, sir."

"Yes, you both deserve credit and shall have it; but what is this I hear, Red Rider, of your going East at once?"

"It is true, sir, for my duty lies here, to care for my adopted father, whose reason I hope will come back."

"I have already written my resignation as Pony Rider, and shall take Sunset Sam's coach Eastward as you return to the fort."

"I am sorry indeed to know this, and yet glad for your sake, for sooner or later your fate would have been to have fallen on that deadly trail."

"We will regret to give you up, yet it is the only thing that will save you from certain death."

"I did not mind the danger, Lieutenant Ames—in fact, I rather enjoyed defying my foes; but I risked life for a purpose. I came here to find Daniel Darwin, and having accomplished my purpose I shall return with him to his home on Lake George."

Just then Buffalo Bill came forward and joined the group, while he said in his off-hand, cheery way:

"Well, Red Rider, you did the work for us well, and the game is bagged."

"I congratulate you upon the rescue of the gentleman whom the parson told me you had vowed to release from his cruel imprisonment."

"Thank you, Buffalo Bill, but I only wish that I had found him restored to reason, for you see—" and he motioned toward the mad miner, whom the chief of scouts had seen before, and who now spoke to him:

"I am glad to see you a free man, Mr. Darwin."

"Who are you?"

"A scout, sir; they call me Buffalo Bill."

"I do not know you."

"Poor fellow!" said the scout, feelingly, as he turned away.

When breakfast was ready, the mad miner ate mechanically and in silence, as he did all things else.

Then came, later in the day, the order for the march, and Daniel Darwin mounted his horse obediently, when told to do so, and side by side rode away from the outlaw camp with the Red Butterfly.

The march was a slow one, for there were wounded men along, and much plunder, but the Overland Trail was reached in time to catch the east-bound coach, on the box of which sat Sunset Sam, one of the best drivers and pluckiest men on the plains.

Leaving his horses in the care of the parson to dispose of, the Red Butterfly bade farewell to those who had been his comrades on the deadly trail, and, entering the coach with the mad miner, was whirled away eastward, followed by a hearty, ringing cheer from the scouts and soldiers.

It was a long, wearisome journey to far-away Lake George in New York State; but the trip was made in safety, the silent, obedient man giving little trouble to his devoted guardian, yet never once showing the slightest recognition of him—never calling him by name.

Back to his boyhood's home, the old farm on the shores of Lake George, went Daniel Darwin—the home which he had left years before, to win a fortune for the maiden he had saved from death, and learned to love.

But the old scenes of his boyhood years brought not reason back to his brain, and, as the finances would soon be at a low ebb, Red Rider felt that something must be done for a living.

As he would have to go away from the farm, he dared not leave his adopted father alone, to the care of a servant only; therefore arrangements were made to place him in the asylum, where it was hoped a cure might also be expedited.

And from that asylum the reader has seen the mad miner taken, by the man who was supposed to have gone to his death over the cliff.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PONY RIDER WANTED.

THE Scouts' League, as stated, was an organization formed of picked men. It was a band of

heroes who knew no such word as fail. Its headquarters were at Fort Venture, at the time of which I write.

This fort was an outpost, a stockade, on the then extreme borderland. It had been located there for its commanding site, its possibilities of fortification, and its capability of standing a siege.

It was upon a ridge, cut in two by a swiftly-flowing river, and sloping away to "the open" on all sides.

The hill was heavily timbered, and the stockade was strong and high.

A bridge was sprung across the river, and within the inclosure were pleasant quarters for the officers and their families, and barracks for the men, with corrals into which to drive cattle and horses in case of danger.

Its armament was a light battery of eight guns, and the force there consisted of a battalion of infantry and another of cavalry, with a full corps of scouts under Buffalo Bill, as chief.

The fort was beyond the terminus of the branch trail of the Overland stages, and held communication by courier, or Pony Riders, with Jumping Off City, half a day's ride distant, and so fatal had the run become it was known as the Death Ride.

The Scouts' League did not comprise the whole scouting force of the post. It was a league of nine men, pledged to certain ends.

Among the regular scouts was an army officer who had won fame as a soldier, and especially as a scout.

This one was Doctor Frank Powell, the post surgeon—a man who had passed most of his life upon the plains and frontier, while he also had dwelt among the Indians at one time, making a study of their character and becoming their medicine-chief.

He had won the name of the Surgeon Scout, and if Frank Powell was along with a command on an expedition no one cared whether there was a scout or guide with the party.

When Buffalo Bill formed the Scouts' League, the wish of the Men in Buckskin was unanimous that the Surgeon Scout should be made one of the number, and so the name of Frank Powell was enrolled after that of Buffalo Bill.

Following it came Wild Bill, Night-Hawk George and Broncho Bill Powell—both the latter brothers of the surgeon; then there were Jack Crawford, Bony Ernest, Tom Sun, and Texas Jack—an array to send terror to the hostile red-skins and the lawless men of the frontier.

The law-breakers of the plains were numerous, while the trails in that region were haunted by the wild and merciless band known as the Red Buzzards, under their desperate leader, Captain Quantrel.

This was the band the Scouts' League had been formed to run to earth, and they had done their work well, with one exception, as we have narrated.

That one, as the reader knows, was Captain Quantrel himself, whose escape caused the writing of this romance of real heroes in wild border life.

The soldiers and scouts, after parting with the Red Pony Rider and the mad miner, continued on to Fort Venture with their wounded, their prisoners and plunder.

A new commander had just been sent to the fort vice the former one promoted and ordered East, and he signaled his taking charge in a decidedly summary manner for the outlaw prisoners, for he ordered them to be at once shot to death.

"I shall give these outlaws on the frontier a sample of the treatment all law-breakers shall receive at my hands when taken," said Colonel Francis Seeley, the new commander, and then came the order for the execution of the seven Buzzards.

The order was promptly obeyed, and the men braced up, for they knew the new colonel was not a man to be trifled with or terrorized.

Lieutenant Andrew Ames, the young cavalry officer in command of the expedition to run down Quantrel and his men, had made his report and told how Go-won-go, the Indian Rider, had given up his place as Pony Rider.

"We must have a man at once, Lieutenant Ames," said Colonel Seeley.

"I can suggest no one, sir, as the trail has been so deadly and fatal it has frightened all the riders off."

"Cannot this gallant fellow, Cody, chief of scouts, suggest some one?"

"Perhaps he may, sir."

An orderly was sent after Buffalo Bill, and the situation placed before him.

At once came the answer:

"I will take the run, sir, until some one else can be found."

"No, you are too valuable a man, Cody, to risk in this way. Think of some one else and send him to me."

The scout saluted and left headquarters, going at once to the cabin home of Surgeon Frank Powell.

"See here, Doctor Frank, you know all about that young Indian Rider, so I come to ask you if it is not possible for you to get him to run again as Pony Rider?"

"Will no man make the trip?"

"It seems not, as the colonel sent for me to find him a man. I volunteered, but he refused my services with a very neat compliment. I should think volunteers could be found, now that the Red Buzzards have gone to their last roost."

"Yes, but they say, and very truthfully, that it was not Quantrel's men who haunted the trail between here and Jumping Off City, and that this run is just as dangerous as before, and will remain so. I believe we could get the young Mohawk-Sioux if you would write to him and urge it."

"I do not think so."

"The pay is big, you know, and you have not sold his horses yet."

"True, but he does not care for the pay."

"He certainly can take no comfort in remaining with that poor crazy adopted father of his."

"That is just it: he will not leave the mad miner."

"Try him and see."

"It will, I am sure, be useless."

"At least give him the chance to refuse, Powell, for I do not care to put Jack Crawford on the run, though, between you and I, he has volunteered for the work, and if any man can make the rides, Jack is the one."

"I did not speak of this to Colonel Seeley, for Jack is too valuable a man to risk, as the colonel said to me; but if I cannot find some one else, I suppose Jack Crawford will go, and that simply means his death."

"Yes, Jack is too valuable, as you say; but would not the Red Rider meet the same fate, Bill?"

"Somehow I think not, Powell, for he is one who bears a charmed life, and I don't believe that the lead is mined to kill him."

"Well, Bill, I see that I have got to convince you that the Indian Rider will not come here again, and to do so I must tell you the truth about him."

"I know that you hold his secret."

"Yes; and I have his permission to make it known to you alone," was the surgeon's reply.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATAL RIDE.

WHATEVER the secret story told Buffalo Bill by Surgeon Powell regarding the mysterious Indian Rider we will not now reveal, but it certainly convinced the chief of scouts that there was no need of sending after Go-won-go to make the perilous runs again.

The next thing to do, therefore, was to find a man for the work.

The Overland stage-company was offering big money for a rider to go through each week on the round run, and the commandant of the fort had entered volunteers upon special pay, as well, for the dangerous service.

This very prize had tempted a number, but every one of them had gone to certain death—if not on the first ride, it would be on the second or third, and surely on the fourth.

The trails were patrolled by the scouts, yet, in some mysterious manner, the Pony Rider would be ambushed and killed and his mail-bags and papers taken.

At last it was decided to send an officer and platoon of soldiers over the run when Number Twelve of the Pony Riders had been laid low.

But just then had reappeared the Indian Rider and taken upon himself the contract of going through.

It was a big contract, yet he accomplished it, and time and again made the run in safety.

"He is Number Thirteen, and it is only a question of time when he falls," said an officer of the fort, and he but expressed the sentiments of all.

Then had come the expedition after Quantrel, and following its success the Red Rider had withdrawn from the trail.

When Buffalo Bill found that he would not return, from what Surgeon Powell had revealed to him of the mysterious Indian youth, he yielded to Jack Crawford's wish to make one run, and was uneasy until his return, and glad, in the mean time, that he had found a man who had volunteered for the work.

This one was a soldier, who, after his discharge had turned miner, struck it rich, squandered his gold, and, returning to the fort, had become a scout.

He was known as Soldier Sam among the scouts, from his having been in the army.

Soldier Sam was a good rider, light of weight and a fearless fellow, and was led to volunteer from the good pay offered.

He started upon his run, well mounted and armed, and followed by the good wishes of all who watched him dash away upon his perilous ride.

The hour for his return arrived but he came not.

The Red Rider had always been on time, and yet Soldier Sam was given an hour, two hours, and then Buffalo Bill was sent out to follow his trail.

They returned late in the night, and reported having found the Pony Rider dead, a bullet-

wound in his forehead, his mail-pouches gone, his body robbed and his horse taken.

They buried him where he fell, adding another grave to the many along the terrible Death Ride.

The next morning the scout went forth with a force to try and follow the trail of the assassins, but, as before, the murderous ambushers had so well covered up their tracks that even all the ingenuity and skill of the Scouts' League could not trail them.

So the pouches were sent through by an escort of cavalry for several weeks, and as no foe on the trail had been seen, another man, also a scout, volunteered for the run.

He rode for three weeks in safety, and then failed to come in one night.

The going out of the scouts found that it was the same old story of death and robbery, and a lost trail, and once again the mails went under escort until yet another man offered himself as a sacrifice.

To protect him, the colonel had scouts guard the trail for over a month; then the danger was considered over, and the rider went unprotected, to meet the same fate as the brave fellows before him.

Buffalo Bill, at that, insisted upon making the ride, and did so in safety for several weeks; one round trip being made each week.

Returning to the fort one afternoon, his horse in a long, swinging lope, and his eyes watchful for peril in every piece of timber, behind every bush and rock, he was making a detour of the very spot for an ambush when he beheld something he had not seen upon his former rides.

It was a white cross on a small hill, from behind which no less than three Pony Riders had lost their lives, their bodies having been found within rifle-range of the spot, and their graves were then in sight.

"That cross was not there yesterday morning when I passed down," muttered Cody, as he brought his horse to a halt, and gazed at the, to him, strange sight.

"I wonder if it is put up as a decoy to get me there," he added.

For some minutes he sat in silence upon his horse, unmindful of being late at the fort.

"An hour or two will make no difference, so I will see what that cross means," he decided.

Having made up his mind to this, he dismounted and stepped behind his horse, close to his heels.

Then he urged his animal on, straight toward the little hill upon which stood the cross which had so attracted his curiosity.

The horse advanced steadily, though seeming to know that his master was using him as a breastwork to guard off a sudden shot.

Up the hill went the animal, until the scout could see beyond the cross and that there was no one ambushed there.

Then did Buffalo Bill stand still there by his horse and wonder at what he beheld skillfully cut into the cross.

It was a cross painted in black and some four feet in height.

The wood was very white, and skillfully cut into it was a skull on one arm of the cross and crossed bones upon the other, while between them was the following in letters etched as by a knife.

"BUFFALO BILL BEWARE!"

"For reasons not to be named, your life will be spared by the assassins of the trail; but if you make another run as Pony Rider, we will take the life of the colonel's daughter, and will kill any scout who rides in your place.

"BE WARNED!"

Such was the warning, and the cross had evidently been placed in position but a few hours.

Taking his pencil and note-book, Buffalo Bill copied what was etched on the cross, mounted his horse and rode on his way, and with no longer the watchful eye he had kept upon the trail before.

He seemed to put faith in the pledge of the assassins of the trail as to his own safety.

He was not very much behind his time in arriving, but enough to cause much anxiety among his friends, and he was greeted with a cheer when seen to be safe.

Dismounting, he at once sought Surgeon Powell, and soon after the two went to the quarters of Colonel Seeley together.

CHAPTER X. THE THREAT.

COLONEL SEELEY, the commander of Fort Venture, was a widower, with one child, a daughter of eighteen, at the time he was ordered to his new command.

His daughter, just out of boarding-school, accompanied him, for, as a girl in her teens, she had seen much of frontier army life in Texas and was glad to return to it again after finishing her education.

Alice Seeley had the satisfaction of having graduated from a fashionable school with the highest honors of her class; though she had been frank enough to admit that this was owing to her most dangerous rival, though a good friend, leaving the institute from some reason before

the day of graduation came, and this, too, in the face of the fact that she would stand Number One in her class.

Alice was a lovely girl, with a magnetic, fascinating manner, with just enough of sarcasm in her speech to be feared a little by the young officers, and a sunny disposition that made her friends with all.

She became at once the belle of the fort, and there was not one who did not admire and respect her, from the major's wife down to the children—the major himself down to the humblest private soldier.

She possessed a sweet, flexible voice, and was ever ready to sing when asked, while she could bring tears to a man's eyes with her pathetic ballads, accompanying herself upon the guitar, or make them laugh heartily when she would pick up her banjo and sing a comic song.

She rode splendidly, having learned as a girl in Texas, and the officers said she was as accomplished with her rifle, revolvers, and lasso-throwing, as she was in music and in sketching.

Such was the young girl against whom the assassins of the trails had made such a dire threat of vengeance in case Buffalo Bill should longer ride the Pony Express.

No wonder, then, that it filled the scout's heart with trepidation, when he had never known fear for himself. So he sought Powell and placed the story of his discovery before him.

Doctor Frank took the slip of paper on which Buffalo Bill had made a copy of the warning on the cross, and reading it over twice carefully, he said:

"This is a very remarkable warning, Bill."

"So I regard it."

"It cuts you off at one blow from riding again."

"You think the threat would be carried out?"

"It would never do to chance it."

"You are right."

"Not when a woman is in the case, and that one our colonel's daughter."

"Ah! I see how you look at it."

"How did you?"

"I took it as a mere bluff."

"It may be, and yet you dare not risk it, for the doings on that trail show those murderers, whoever they are, to be in deadly earnest."

"You are right, Frank."

"And more: if it was simply the threat against any one who rode in your place, only that one must take his chances as you have done, and Jack Crawford and others."

"A man who follows our trade must risk everything, Bill; but, here comes in this threat against a woman—yes, and the loveliest little woman who ever won a poor soldier's heart."

"Haven't caught the fever, eh, Frank?"

"Oh, no; I speak of her as I know her, and as you know her, for married or single, we all love her, while there are some who will never recover from the wounds Alice Seeley's bright eyes give them."

"I believe you are right."

"I know I am, and so we must protect this girl."

"And I am to give up the ride?"

"Of course; for, outside of this threat, you cannot neglect your duties as chief of scouts to do this work."

"You are right there, for I have to neglect my own work."

"Then you cannot send any of your men, for we cannot afford to lose any one of our nine of the Scouts' League, Bill, through an assassin's shot."

"Very true, Frank."

"So Jack Crawford and the other boys must not venture."

"Who, then?"

"If no one volunteers, the escort plan must be put into execution again."

"Now, would you tell Colonel Seeley about this?"

"Of course."

"It will distress him."

"He is a soldier, and will take it like the man he is."

"I verily believe, if his duty commanded him to send you, his daughter's life being the forfeit, he would obey."

"That is my opinion of him."

"Now, come; I will go with you, and we will talk it over with the colonel, while I will accompany you to-night to get that cross, for it must not remain there to be seen by others, as it will tell the story of why you quit the ride."

"I agree with you there," assented Cody, and the two friends repaired to headquarters.

The colonel received them in his pleasant way, for he was the courtly gentleman as well as the perfect soldier, and then said:

"Well, Cody, I congratulate you upon being yet alive, in spite of your dangerous rides."

"It is to tell you, Colonel Seeley, that I am no longer in any personal danger, that I am here with Surgeon Powell."

"What do you mean by personal danger, Cody?"

"Read this, sir, please."

The colonel did so, and both saw his face turn white, though not a muscle of his stern, handsome features moved.

"What am I to understand from this, Mr. Cody?"

"I copied it, sir, to-day, from a cross set in a hill from behind which three Pony Riders have been shot."

"The cross itself is painted jet-black, some four feet in height, is of white wood, and has cut into it most skillfully a skull, cross-bones and the lettering which you read on that slip of paper."

"It had been put there but a short while before I came along the trail, sir, and upon my arrival at the post I at once sought Surgeon Powell, and he came with me to you."

"Well, this threat strikes at me cruelly—at my heart, but the trail has to be ridden, and you, Cody, must do your duty," was the stern response of the gallant officer, and both the surgeon and the scout glanced at each other and gazed admiringly upon him.

"No, Colonel Seeley, in the face of that threat I decline to ride Pony Express, sir, and I hope you will bear me out that it is from no personal fear."

"I will gladly do that, Cody," said the colonel earnestly, while Frank Powell remarked:

"No, Colonel Seeley, Cody is neglecting his duty, as it is, to ride Pony Express, and the escort plan must be resorted to again—A letter for me, orderly?"

"Yes, sir; it came in the mail, and I have been looking for you as it is marked important," and the orderly handed over the letter.

"Pardon me, Colonel Seeley," and breaking the seal, Surgeon Powell after one glance cried excitedly:

"Go-won-go, the Red Rider, is coming back to the fort!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE.

THE announcement of Surgeon Frank Powell, in the headquarters of Colonel Seeley, that Go-won-go, the Red-skin Rider, was coming West again, was received with an inquiring look from the commandant, and with amazement by Buffalo Bill.

Having heard the story of Frank Powell, of why the Indian youth should remain East in private life, the chief of scouts could not understand why it was that he was coming West again.

Colonel Seeley said, as the surgeon still glanced over his letter:

"As you seem to know more than any one else about this strange young Indian, Powell, of whom I have heard so much, pray tell me something of him."

"I can only tell you, Colonel Seeley, that the young Indian was taken East and educated by the mad miner, Dan Darwin, whom we rescued from the band of Quantrel."

"When his adopted father came West and fell into the power of Quantrel, the Indian at once took the trail to rescue him, and for that reason assumed the position of Pony Rider here at the fort, while secretly he was playing detective, and to good purpose."

"Now I have a letter from him saying that he will return at once, and to ask for him once more the place of Pony Rider."

"Egad, but he shall have it and welcome, Surgeon Powell, for I can find no one else to take it, now that Cody withdraws," declared the colonel.

"When does he arrive, Powell?" asked Buffalo Bill, with considerable interest.

"His letter says that we may expect him soon, and that, if I have not sold his horses, to hold on to them, and if sold, I am to buy them back again, or animals just as good."

"Now, Colonel Seeley, there will be no more trouble about the Pony Rider, for that youth will make the rides, you may be sure."

"I am glad of that, and I confess to an anxiety to see this young Indian, whose education has been so thorough, from all I have heard. If he does not come within the week, I shall have to send the mail and Express out under escort, for it must go, you know."

"Yes, sir."

"I dislike to do this, as it takes my soldiers beyond my jurisdiction, while it puts upon an officer and a dozen men the work of one man. But the mail must go through, and I'll send the escort, yet hope for the Indian's arrival before the day for its going."

"Now, Cody, tell me what you think of this cruel threat to make my poor child the sufferer if you dare go out again with the Express."

"I looked upon it as a bluff, Colonel Seeley, and yet those men have shown so little mercy to the Pony Riders, be they whom they may, I, for one, would not dare venture to disobey their warning, for fear Miss Seeley might be made the victim of their cruel threat."

"Well said, Cody; and now I would like your views, Surgeon Powell."

"Exactly as Cody says, I think, sir, and I would not see Miss Seeley placed in danger under any circumstances."

"Yet how could they do her harm?"

"Ah, Colonel Seeley, there are many ways, as Buffalo Bill will tell you, for those ambushers

are daring, desperate fellows, and if they meant their threat in earnest they would risk much to carry it out."

"Very true; but I shall see that Alice goes into no danger, though, if Cody does not ride Express, they will not, I suppose, carry out their threat."

"No, sir; but these men, who dare make such a base threat, must be found and weeded out, sir."

"You are right, Powell; they must be taken, and to-morrow I will show my earnestness in their capture by offering a personal reward of one thousand dollars for the body, dead or alive, of any one of them," and the colonel spoke in a tone that showed how much in earnest he was, for the threat against his daughter had cut him to the heart and angered him deeply.

"As it is best, Colonel Seeley, that this cross be not seen by others, I told Cody I would accompany him to-night to get it, and we will place it in your keeping."

"How far is it from here, Cody?"

"About twelve miles, sir, and we can easily return before dawn."

"Very well; it would be a good idea to get it, for I would not care to have Alice know of it, though she is not of a nervous nature."

"Still it is better she should not know," Surgeon Powell responded, and soon after the two friends took their departure.

"Bill?"

"Yes, Doc."

"The colonel is just the man we thought him."

"He is, indeed; but what brings that Indian back to this country?"

"I have not read the whole letter yet, for it is a long one, and we must be off now after that cross before some one else sees it and spreads the news until it reaches the ears of Miss Seeley, for, though she is a nervy girl, she cannot but feel it to know a threat has been made upon her life by men who would be guilty of anything."

"We will go at once, and then I would like to know about that letter, for since you told me what you did about the Red Rider, I am anxious to know just what fetches him back to this country again; and more—to seek the same dangerous position he had before."

"That is what surprises me, unless—"

"Unless what, Frank?"

"Maybe it is to make money, for I have an idea the mad miner was not a rich man."

"That may be it, for he wrote you he had been forced to place the miner in an asylum, I believe?"

"Yes, and so has decided to make the money to pay the heavy expense, I guess."

"But he takes big chances."

"He does indeed, and will deserve every dollar he gets."

The two now mounted their horses and rode away from the fort, and after a ride of a couple of hours cautiously approached the hill, but not from the trail.

As they neared it they dismounted, and Buffalo Bill went forward on foot, Surgeon Powell holding the horses.

Soon came the call:

"Come! It is still here."

Doctor Frank advanced, and with little effort the cross was pulled up, and carrying it before him on the horn of the saddle, Buffalo Bill led the way back to the fort.

It was after midnight some time when they arrived, but a light still burned in Colonel Seeley's quarters, and thither they bore the cross. Hearing their approach, the commandant at once let them in, himself.

With feelings of indignation and anger the three examined the cross, the neatly-cut-in skull, crossbones and lettering, and then it was hidden away by the commandant with the remark:

"Some day I hope to have those fellows within reach of my arm."

Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill repaired to the former's quarters for a late supper and to read the letter of the Red Rider before they retired, for somehow that letter weighed heavily upon their minds.

CHAPTER XII.

GO-WON-GO'S LETTER.

THE surgeon and the scout ate a hearty supper, cold though it was, and then Doctor Powell drew the letter of Go-won-go from his pocket, snuffed the candle and remarked:

"Now, Bill, we will learn all about this strange move of the Red-skin Rider in coming again to the wild West and risking his precious life, when he could remain in safety and comfort in the East."

"I confess to a woman's curiosity to know, Doc," answered Cody.

The letter was dated at New York, and was as follows:

"MY DEAR DOCTOR POWELL:—"

"I wrote you of my having to place my adopted father in a private asylum for the insane, yet gave you no particular reason for doing so."

"I wish now to tell you that it was because I felt that I should have to go to work to earn a

living for both of us, and so could not leave him at home, the farm on Lake George."

"If he had his reason, there would be no cause to worry about finances, but, as it was, I had to get work of some kind, for our exchequer was getting light."

"I first rented the farm for a fair price, and then, learning that I could make a handsome salary in giving exhibitions as a dead shot with a rifle and revolver, I engaged with a showman at a liberal figure, and began my traveling as 'The Indian Dead Shot.'"

"I hated the life, yet it paid well, and I stuck to it until a letter reached me which had been forwarded to my home on Lake George."

"The contents of that letter caused me to ask you right here to hold on to my horses, if you have not sold them, or if you have, to buy them back, or others just as good, at any price, for I am coming West with all dispatch."

"Ah! that was the part of the letter that caught your eye, Frank," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, that was it; but, listen to the balance, for it is getting interesting to me."

Then Surgeon Powell resumed reading:

"The letter forwarded on after me was from Doctor Dunn of the asylum, and it startled me, as you can understand when you know its contents."

"It was in effect, that, some two weeks before, a carriage had driven out from the city of New York, containing a coachman and two men, one of whom sent in his card as Doctor Wilber."

"He, Doctor Wilber, also had a letter from Doctor Sayre Mott, the well-known New York surgeon, saying that it had been decided to perform an operation upon Daniel Darwin, hoping it would restore his reason, and as he, Mott, could not come to the asylum, he sent Doctor Wilber and an attendant to bring the patient to his house in the city."

"Of course Doctor Dunn suspected nothing, and my adopted father was made ready to accompany Doctor Wilber."

"He pleaded not to go, even saying that they would kill him; but it was looked upon as the ravings of his malady, and not heeded."

"So they took him away, and it was not until a week or more after that Doctor Dunn wrote to know the result of the surgical experiment."

"To his amazement, he learned that Daniel Darwin had never been to Doctor Mott's, nor did that gentleman know aught about him or of Doctor Wilber."

"In alarm Doctor Dunn went to see the great surgeon, and found the letter to have been written on letter-heads of Doctor Mott's, and a close imitation of his writing, but it was a forgery."

"So a letter was written to me, and search was begun."

"The letter went to Lake George, and thus followed me around; but the moment I received it I proceeded to New York."

"The forged letter, the plot, the paying of the amount due to the end of the month for Daniel Darwin—all showed the deep-laid scheme to kidnap him."

"I at once decided that either Quantrel had not been killed, or one of his men, who knew all about the affair, had plotted to get my adopted father in his hands again."

"To explain more fully, my own father, an Indian chief, discovered a gold mine, and kept the secret to himself. He drew a map of the mine's surroundings on buckskin, and gave it to me."

"When dying he left me to the care of Daniel Darwin, then a rich miner, who was just then on his return home to claim the hand of a lady whom he loved."

"He nobly accepted the trust, took me East with him, and placed me at school."

"His lady love was false to him, and it well-nigh crushed his heart, ambition and all."

"In time, the banks with whom he had his money failed, and he came to me and said he was to turn miner again."

"Then I told him the story of my inheritance from my Indian father, and which I had hardly thought of before. I gave him the buckskin map, and he went West, as you know."

"He was recognized by some outlaw, perhaps Quantrel himself, as Yankee Dan, the miner, and attacked in the stage-coach, which they ran off with from Miner's Roost."

"They failed to get his map, however, and gave him that wound on the head which destroyed his reason, and when you were caring for him in your cabin at Miner's Roost, while you were playing the detective on the Quantrel band, they kidnapped him and carried him to their retreat."

"All this you know, yet I recall it to show how determined Quantrel was to get possession of Daniel Darwin, for the purpose, undoubtedly, of extorting from him the secret of his mine, which proves they did not get the buckskin map."

"I acquainted myself with all facts, kept the kidnapping a secret, and took the trail, cold as it was."

"But I found the driver of the carriage, discovered that the boat was taken at Newburg, and the three men, the two captors and their captive, rode over to the Erie road, and took the fast Express from the junction for the West."

"I tracked them slowly but surely, and left the trail at Chicago, when I discovered that they had taken the train to the last station where the coaches of the Overland begin to run."

"Then I returned to New York, and am arranging my affairs to come West at once."

"So I come again as the Red-skin Rider, for as such I can do the best detective work."

"You were kind enough to say once that you would always hold yourself ready to serve me, and the Scouts' League would be my friends: I take you at your word, my dear Doctor Powell, and will beg of you to see if you can discover any clue that will be of interest to me by the time I return, only keep the kidnapping of Daniel Darwin as a dark secret."

"I learn that a new commander is at Fort Venture, and I leave it to you to place my case before him as you may deem best, while you are at liberty to tell the secret to that splendid fellow, Buffalo Bill."

"Expect me to follow this letter as soon as possible, for I shall take up the trail where the stages

meet the railroad, and I left off, and follow it to the end."

"With every good wish, believe me, sir,

Your friend,

"Go-won-go,

"The Red Rider."

Such was the missive, and when Doctor Powell and Buffalo Bill had digested its contents the sun was peering into the pleasant quarters of the surgeon.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALONG THE OVERLAND.

THE branch of the Overland that went through Miner's Roost and had its terminus at Jumping Off City had shortened the run of the coach on the last end of the trail, making the relay at what was known as Dismal City—a place that did not belie its name, as far as the dismal prefix was concerned, though a person would have searched in vain for the "city"—which was a myth.

It was as dismal a spot as could be found, and yet it was stirring, for, right there in the canyons, valleys and mountain, gold had been found in paying quantities and it had gathered there as wild a lot of humans as one would care to see.

From Dismal City a rugged coach-trail led up to Miner's Roost, with two relay stations between for the changing of horses—these stations being presided over by one or two men to take care of the animals and make the changes of teams.

There was a valley on the way which no driver cared to pass through at night.

A cross erected at a place on the river-bank told of the wiping out at that point of the driver, passengers, horses and coach by the Red Buzzards.

It was said that the driver, passengers and horses had been killed, and a freshet of the river had swept all away soon after, for nothing was found to tell the tale, and an outlaw, when on the gallows some time after, had confessed the truth of the whole-sale massacre.

There were also other graves here and there along the trail to mark the red work of the road scourges.

Then came Miner's Roost—a place which would have been more appropriately known as Devil's Den, for it held the record of all camps along the Overland Trails for being the deadliest spot to dwell in on earth.

No one was allowed to die there except with his boots on, and Jumping Off City tried hard to emulate the example set by its rival, Miner's Roost.

Jumping Off City was about the same distance from Miner's Roost as was that place from Dismal City, and between them lay two relay stations.

At Miner's Roost was an alleged hotel known as Overland Lodge, presided over by one Jerry Thomas, but whom the miners had christened Tom-and-Jerry.

It was the surprise of Mr. Thomas's life that he had never been killed; but, as he kept the best tavern in the camps, and was coining money, he took the chances until he could amass a considerable fortune, which he was getting a firmer grip on each year.

Fortune's Favorite, his saloon and gambling-hall, had been the scene of more deadly encounters than any other spot numbering a like number of square feet.

Jumping Off City, as has been said, was the terminus of the Overland branch, and coaches halted there, the trail on to Fort Venture, fifty miles away, being such that a stage could not have made the run under a couple of days.

It was as wild and desolate a trail as could be found in the West, and the graves of those who had been waylaid and murdered along it did not enliven the tramp, *en route*, in the least.

It was this trail that had been so mysteriously and persistently ambushed for the Pony Riders, and which had to be patrolled if a rider was expected to go through, and then he was taking big chances.

As Fort Venture was the last barrier, the advance post between the Indian country and the mines and settlements, all the scouts and soldiers were needed beyond, and not behind it, and it was hard work to keep a cavalry squad as patrols clear to Dismal City, for if the secret assassins of the Pony Riders failed to get their man between Jumping Off City and Fort Venture, they were very apt to do so on the two runs beyond.

The reader can now realize the situation fully, of life in that wild land, the perils and hardships of the soldiers and scouts, the desperate existence in the mining-camps, the dangers of the stage lines, and the appalling odds the Pony Riders had to face in their lightning fights from post to post.

Since the destruction of Quantrel and his band, the coaches had gone through from Jumping Off City to Dismal City without molestation; but the trail between Jumping Off City and Fort Venture held even greater peril than before the taking off of the Buzzards.

This was what the people could not understand, for it seemed to prove the existence of a

separate organization from Quantrel's, and against the Pony Riders alone.

When it is known that those flying horsemen of the Overland Trails carried valuable official letters, the fort mail, smaller Express packages, and often large sums of money, the capture of one was often a bonanza to the road-raiders.

Sunset Sam, the driver of the coach from Dismal City to Jumping Off City, was a man from whose make-up all fear had been left out. He was "square," honest, utterly self-reliant, and a terror if forced into trouble, which he religiously avoided, when possible.

Day or night he would drive the trails without an accident, was a perfect master of horse-flesh, and when "held up" by the outlaws, was not fool enough to fight against a dead-sure certainty of death, yet was quick to take advantage if anything offered itself to his keen vision.

"Ther trail is awful dull now, pard," he said to Landlord Jerry Thomas, of Overland Lodge, as he mounted his box at Miner's Roost for the drive to Jumping Off City.

Then away he went, a cigar between his lips, but within two miles of Miner's Roost he was brought to a sudden halt by the stern, ominous words:

"Halt! Hands up, Sunset Sam!"

"Waal, I'll be blest! I jist said ther trail were dull, and now it be more lively than I likes," he muttered.

But he obeyed the order with a promptness born of caution.

It was bright moonlight, and though he saw no one he knew that many men might be lurking in the shadows.

"Waal, I'm halted, hands is up, so call yer tune," he said, in an indifferent way.

"Who have you along?"

"Two dead beats, and dead drunks, too. They c'u'dn't pay scores at Miner's Roost, so ther men thar bought 'em seats up ter Dismal City ter make 'em a present ter ther lay-out. You kin have 'em if yer wishes, in welcome."

"They are just the men we want," said a stern voice, and a man stepped out from the shadows and advanced toward the coach, while Sunset Sam eyed him closely, watching and waiting his chance to act, if any chance offered.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MOONLIGHTERS.

"SAY, pard, be you ther ghost o' Cap'n Quantrel?" asked Sunset Sam coolly as the man came into sight, when the moonlight fell full upon him.

He was dressed in black, slouch hat and top-boots, and over his face was what appeared to be a silver mask, for it shone brightly.

It was apparently cut to fit the face, but to hide it completely.

The man was armed with a belt in which Sunset Sam saw two revolvers, while he held another in his hand.

"No, I am not Quantrel's ghost," was the reply to Sam's question.

"Who be you then?"

"A moonlighter."

"Oa, you be! Is that a new name fer road-agent?"

"Yes, we are moonlighters that have held you up this time, Sunset," said the road-agent.

"Well, moonlighters or midnighters, you is a thievin' lot, that's dead sure gospel."

"Don't call us by so harsh name, Sam, for we are gentlemen of the road, and do things in true Duval style."

"You knows me?"

"Oh, yes, and we are going to become better acquainted, as I shall often hold up your coach, Samivel."

"Yas, and ther rope will hold you up some time."

"It's catching before hanging, pard."

"Then cotched you is—hands up!" cried Sunset Sam, dropping his revolver suddenly upon the moonlighter.

Sam had taken desperate chances. The idea had suddenly flashed upon him that the man in the silver mask was alone.

He had seen no other, heard no sound from either side of the trail, and, had the bandit not been alone, why did not his confederates step out and show themselves when their leader did, he argued.

So, quick as a flash, he drew his revolver, which he kept in a holster on the box, and leveled it.

The road-raider laughed at his act, and called out:

"See here, Sam, don't be a fool."

"I hain't as big a fool as I looks, and if you moves ther photograph of a inch I'll kill yer," Sunset Sam cried, from his seat.

"I do not intend to move, ner do I wish to give an order to my men to kill you."

"Yer hain't got ther photograph of a man with yer, for yer has undertook this leetle job alone, and has bit off more'n yer kin chaw."

"See here, Sunset, I wish no quarrel with you, for you bring me my gold, as no other man would drive this trail. I would not kill you for the world; so just put up your revolver and behave yourself."

"Show up yer men, or I pulls trigger; and maybe I kin shoot a leetle bit."

"I will not show up my men, for we are moonlighters, and I am enough for you to see—you'll never see more; but I'll let the men answer for their presence."

"Let 'em talk quick, for my finger are gittin' nervous a-pressin' on ther trigger o' my gun."

"All right, Sunset; hearing is believing, as well as seeing, is it not?"

"Let 'em shout!"

The road-raider saw that Sam was thoroughly convinced that he had no backers and in deadly earnest, so he called out:

"Ho, Jack!"

"Ay, ay, cap'n!"

"Ho, Jill!"

"Here, sir!"

"Jingo Jim!"

"On hand, cap'n!"

The answers came from back in the shadows at various points, and the moonlighter then demanded:

"Are you convinced, Samuel?"

"I be, and I hauls in my gun; but, warn't there no other letter in ther alphabet but J when them jays was christened, Pard Moonlighter?"

"These names suit me, Sunset, and let me hint to you right now that, because you don't see my men, don't take the idea that they are not around, or your mistake may cost you your life."

"Come, Mister Moonlight, I hain't no time ter listen ter sarmons, so do yer stealin' act and let me go on."

"Well, who have you in your coach?"

"Two dead beats, I told yer."

"Then I'll make dead-heads of them," and the moonlighter threw open the coach door.

The two passengers within were lying on the seats, one back, the other forward, and snoring lustily.

"They hasn't got a dollar ter bless 'emselves with," declared the driver.

For answer the moonlighter seized one of the men by the shoulder, and, with a wonderful exhibition of strength, dragged him out of the coach.

In an instant the other followed.

"What is it, pards? Time ter git up?" said one sleepily, while the other snored as serenely as before.

"Hand me out the money you have hidden in your boot, sir!" sternly ordered the moonlighter.

"I have no money—" and the man paused, while, quick as a flash, came a shot from the moonlighter's revolver.

The man, who had half-risen, dropped back, dead.

"I will stand no fooling, as you see, Sunset," calmly remarked the mask. "This one, and that one, too, have plenty of money. See me get it!"

He drew his knife, and, bending over the slain man began to cut off his boot-tops.

The snoring of the other man had ceased, and he lay as still as death, while Sunset Sam, from his box, looked down savagely upon the proceedings.

"I'll get a good haul, Sam, from these old boots, and as much more from a pocket in the back of that man's old red woolen shirt. You see, I know where to look for a gold-mine," and the moonlighter had nearly finished cutting off the boot-tops, for he worked cautiously, as though fearing to cut something he wished to preserve, when the loud clatter of hoofs fell upon his ears.

The moonlighter sprang to his feet, listened an instant and cried:

"Cavalry! by all that's holy! Curses! I am foiled!"

With a bound he had disappeared in the shadow of a rock, just as the clatter of hoofs grew louder and nearer, coming up the trail at a run.

"Say, pard, yer forgot ter say good-by ter me!" called out Sam, after the robber, while, to his surprise, the other passenger sprang to his feet, and, kneeling by the side of his dead comrade, cried bitterly:

"My God! he did kill him! Poor Veasey! and this is your sad end, my comrade!"

Sam was touched by the man's words and manner. The fact that the moonlighter had seemed to know the men—that he knew they carried money with them, in spite of their rough appearance and their seeming to be dead-beats, surprised him.

Now the words of the stranger implied that they had been playing a part; but ere he could speak a horseman dashed in sight, and the sound of many hoofs dwindled down to one horse, for the echoes in the canyon had given the impression that there were more.

This, Sunset Sam knew all the while, though the moonlighter did not, and suspected a cavalry company to be coming at a run to the rescue.

Another moment and the horseman dashed into view in the moonlight. It was the Red Rider, and as he drew rein he called out:

"Ho, Sunset Sam! what's wrong?"

CHAPTER XV.

ON SECRET SERVICE.

THE patrol returned with the mail, which contained a letter to Colonel Seeley, whose contents seemed to trouble him somewhat, and he sent for Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill.

"I have here a letter written in cipher," said Colonel Seeley, when Doctor Powell and Buffalo Bill entered his quarters; "it is from Paymaster Hugh Birney, ordered to report here to me. He is accompanied by his clerk, he says, and they are to bring with them a large sum of money to pay off the troops."

"He speaks of the danger of the trail from road-agents, and says that he will come through all right, if he has to drive the coach as a new man put on, and transform Todd Veasey, his clerk, into an itinerant parson."

"Look out for him, he says, about the tenth, and, if it is convenient, he wishes me to send a patrol along the trail as far as Dismal City."

"Now, as the escort brought the mail, it is two days later than if a Pony Rider had come with it."

"To-day is the tenth, so I must order an escort for Birney at once to start for Dismal City and meet him on the way, doubtless. He carries too much money to be allowed to be robbed by any road-agent who might suspect his identity."

"I will go as guide, sir; and, as Lieutenant Ames is a rapid rider, you should send him," suggested Buffalo Bill.

"My idea was to send half a dozen men, and have them ride rapidly, Cody. Perhaps you had better take your scouts."

"I am ready, sir, and will at once order out my men," was the prompt reply.

"Return here before you start," requested the colonel.

And he turned to Surgeon Powell and continued:

"Now, Powell, what is it about that wild young Indian Rider coming back?"

"I had a letter from him, as I said, sir, in which he states he is on the way back to the post, and wishes the place of Pony Rider from the fort to Dismal City."

"Heaven knows he can have it, and he is alone in his desire for the hateful place."

"Yet he knows more than any one else the danger of the ride, sir."

"Doubtless, from all I hear; and, what is more, he has about as little dread of death as any one I ever heard of."

"He bears a charmed life, Colonel Seeley, and apparently knows it."

"But, I wish to tell you, sir, that it is not wholly for the position of Pony Rider that he comes."

"Indeed?"

"In confidence, Colonel Seeley, let me say that when Go-won-go was here before, as rider, he was also in the employ of the Overland Company as detective. He had two purposes—one to hunt down the outlaws of the trails, and the other to rescue his adopted father, Dan Darwin—whom, holding the secret of a gold-mine, Quantrel had captured and held until he could force him to make known his secret."

"He had wounded the miner so that his reason was gone, and when rescued the poor fellow was taken back by the Indian rider to his home in the East."

"Ah, yes; so I learned."

"And this letter tells me that the mad miner has been kidnapped from the asylum and brought West again."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is, sir."

"And the kidnapper?"

"That is the mystery, sir, for all of us who pursued Quantrel and his men saw them dash to their death over the cliff, and believe the chief to be dead; but this remarkably bold kidnapping scheme looks like his act, and the Red Rider so believes it to be from his letter."

"Then Quantrel did not die?"

"It would seem so, sir; yet it may be one of his men who, in some way, escaped, and knowing the secret of the miner's knowledge of the gold-mine, kidnapped him to force it from him."

"And this may be the solution; though, from all I have heard of Quantrel, it looks like his own act."

"It does, sir."

"If so he will, if he does not force the mad miner's secret from him, take to the road again."

"He is certain to do so, Colonel Seeley."

"And we will have a hard job on our hands to get rid of him?"

"Yes, sir; and it can only be done as it was before."

"How is that?"

"By strategy, sir."

"I see."

"Detective work, such as the Red Rider and one other did before."

"And that other, Surgeon Powell?"

"Well, sir, I must again tell you, in confidence, that no one other than yourself and the Scouts' League must know who the other is."

"Certainly, and it is one of the Scouts' League?"

"It is, sir."

"You do not wish to name him?"

"Oh yes, Colonel Seeley, I must do so to obtain leave of you for a special purpose, for I am the other Overland detective," said Surgeon Powell.

"You?"

"Yes, sir; the Red Rider was my ally, and we work together like oxen."

"Yes, I was told by my predecessor that you had done some wonderfully clean detective work in getting rid of the Red Buzzards; and now you desire to try your hand again, Powell, as an Overland detective?"

"It seems to point that way, sir, from Red Rider's letter, and his coming."

"You do not wish to have it known you are on secret work?"

"No, sir, for we know not whether the outlaws have a spy in camp or not."

"How can you arrange it, Powell?"

"I would ask leave, sir, to go to Omaha, and Buffalo Bill and his men can have the excuse of going as my escort, if you wish, as far as Dismal City, if they have to go that far."

"Yes, that is a good idea; but you will not await the coming of this Indian rider?"

"I will meet him, sir, without fail, somewhere on the road."

"Well, Powell, you have the leave, yet I hate to see my best officers go into what seems the deadliest peril, and I do you only justice in saying so."

"Thank you, sir, but somehow I can get at the bottom of this lawlessness better than others, it seems, and I am really fond of Secret Service work."

"So I have heard, and you have done valuable service as a detective— Hal! what does all that cheering mean?"

Loud cheers were heard out in the stockade, and just then Buffalo Bill entered headquarters, ready for the trail, and said quickly:

"Colonel Seeley, the Indian Pony Rider is coming like a deer over the open!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RED RESCUER.

WHEN Sunset Sam saw the horseman, in the bright moonlight, and beheld who it was that had come to the rescue so bravely, he uttered a wild yell which must have been heard by the retreating chief of the moonlighters in his rapid flight for safety.

The horseman was indeed Go-won-go, the Red Rider, clad in his trim suit of white buckskin, fringed and beaded, top-boots, sombrero, and belt of arms.

In one gauntlet-gloved hand he held a revolver, as for use, and the other grasped his bridle-rein.

He sat his horse splendidly, and had a small, silver-bespangled saddle and bridle with silver bit.

Behind his saddle was an oil-skin roll, with his blanket, and across the seat was thrown a pair of saddle-bags in which he carried his mail, dispatches and Express.

"Whoop! whoop! whoop!"

"Three cheers for Red Lightning, ther Injun Pony Rider," yelled Sunset Sam, and he gave the cheers himself, which the Red Rider silenced with the remark:

"Keep still, Sam, for if they know I am alone they'll come back and wipe us all out."

"You is talkin' truth now, young Injun pard, and I are as silent as a dead man."

"But I are as glad ter see yer as I were ter scratch when I had ther measles, God bless yer."

"But hain't this sudden, yer coming back?"

"A little sudden, Sam, and I am glad to see you again, old fellow."

"Glad ter see you don't express it—whoop!"

"Hold on, Sam!"

"Sure, I forgot in my overjoy at seein' yer, pard; but what fetched yer here?"

"My horse, and he's a dandy."

"I knows he is or you wouldn't ride him; but is yer here to stay?"

"Yes, I want money and I came to work for it, for Pony Riding is good pay."

"They gave me some mail to bring through that arrived after you left Dismal City, and here I am."

"You bet! but did you stop in Miner's Roost?"

"No, I just scooted through on the run, as I had no business there, and am anxious to get on, for my one horse is doing the work this run."

"And you got here just in time to save that pilgrim yonder, though t'other poor feller has passed in his chips."

"I am sorry; but I expected you were in trouble when I heard the shots, and then I gave a bugle-call, which you know I can imitate pretty well, and came on to see what was up."

"Waal, yer found out, and yer saved further trouble, fer," and Sunset Sam lowered his voice to a whisper, "them pilgrims wasn't what they 'peared to be."

"One is Paymaster Birney, and the other was his clerk."

"They are on their way to Fort Venture, and took the character of dead beats to get through with the large amount of money they carry."

"That's it, be it!"

"Waal, ther gent seems all broke up at ther takin' off o' his pard; but he'll soon git used to it out here."

Just at this moment the one referred to advanced to where the Red Rider and Sunset Sam stood, and said:

"Yer come jist in time, pard, and for myself I thanks yer; but my poor friend thar turned up his toes."

"Yes, Paymaster Birney, I am sorry I was not here in time to save his life," replied Red Rider quietly.

"You know me?" cried the man addressed, dropping his border dialect in his surprise at having been recognized by the Pony Rider, whom he now regarded closely as the moonlight fell full upon his face.

"As Paymaster Birney, sir," and the Red Rider smiled at the surprise upon the other's face.

Intending to play a part, Paymaster Birney looked it, as did also his dead companion.

Both of them were dressed in miner costume, much the worse for wear, heavy large boots, slouch hats ragged in the crown, and wore a belt of arms that at least looked like good weapons.

There was a growth of several weeks' beard on the face of each, their hair was unkempt, their faces none the cleanest, and they had been taken along the Overland for a couple of dead-broke and dead-beat miners.

Landlord Jerry Thomas did not like the looks of the two men, and had started a subscription to send them to Jumping Off City, a place where every one not wanted in Miner's Roost was forwarded.

So the two men were shipped by Sunset Sam's coach for Jumping Off City, and, believed to be drunk, they were bundled in and left to themselves.

It was a surprise, then, for Sunset Sam to discover that the two were known to the moonlighter chief and carried money about them.

"Waal, Pard Red Lightnin', yer knows it all," said Sunset Sam, as the rider made the remark stating who the two travelers were.

"May I ask how you know me, for I suppose there is no need of denying what is a fact?"

"You halted in Omaha a few days ago, sir, and met one who claimed to be an army officer, stationed in Texas."

"We did."

"You explained to him how worried you were about getting through to Fort Venture with your money."

"I did."

"He told you of a plan that he had once put into execution, and which had served him well."

"Yes, it was to beat our way through as peniless miners, dressing as such and paying the company afterward."

"He gave me the plan and we adopted it."

"And he was none other than the man who halted you here to night," was the cool reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MYSTERIOUS TRAILER.

THAT Paymaster Birney was amazed at the words of the youth, whom Sunset Sam, in his enthusiasm, had called Red Lightning, would be to put it mildly.

He was simply astounded, and said:

"I did meet a man there whom I supposed was Lieutenant Lemuel, an officer whom I had once met."

"I asked if such was his name, and he replied in the affirmative, telling me that, though my face was familiar, he failed to recall me."

"I told him my name then, and he seemed glad to meet me."

"We dined together, and that night he told me he was there with his eldest brother, who had lost his mind, and in company with a sergeant he was taking him East to an asylum, having just come up from New Mexico."

"I saw his brother and the sergeant, and in a quandary as how to get through with a large sum of money I carried, I told him about it."

"At once he suggested that I make up a disguise, put my money in our boots, and in pockets made in the back of our shirts, and go through as dead-broke miners, after waiting a couple of weeks to get roughened up and look what we professed to be."

"I was delighted with his plan, told him I would adopt it, and the next evening he left by coach for the East, with his brother and the sergeant."

"Yes, he went back to Council Bluffs, then left the coach, bought horses, and the three men flanked Omaha and struck the Overland Trail far on ahead."

"Can this be possible?" cried Paymaster Birney.

"It is true, sir, for I have been on the trail of that man for weeks."

"And he was not Lieutenant Lemuel?"

"No more than you are, sir."

"And then?"

"He came on ahead of you some two weeks, left the trail long before reaching Dismal City and then I lost him."

"Alone?"

"No, he had the madman with him and the

one he called sergeant; but please do not speak of this in making your report to the colonel commanding Fort Venture."

"You have a motive for this, of course?"

"I have, sir, and as I was here to serve you I ask you to do me this favor."

"Gladly I will."

"You can say that you met one who claimed to be an officer, and suspecting your mission he headed you off, being a road-agent."

"Yes, and you know who this man is?"

"I have strong suspicions that I do, sir."

"And you were following him?"

"I have trailed him from New York, sir."

"Indeed! but now let me thank you most sincerely for your timely aid, and—"

"It was an accident, sir, but I am glad it happened so."

"You are modest, yet the fact stands that I owe you my life and you saved a large sum of money to the Government."

"I am happy to have been of service, Paymaster Birney."

"Now, sir, as you know me, give me the pleasure of knowing who my gallant rescuer is."

"I am Go-won-go, the Pony Rider, sir."

"See here, pard, yer draws it too modest, so I'll interdooce yer," broke in Sunset Sam.

"This young Injun be a Pony Rider, yas, sir, but he are heaps more."

"They calls him Red Butterfly in these parts, Red Rider, Injun Mail Carrier, and I has christened him Red Lightnin'."

"He be ther best rider I ever seen, kin shoot to hit dead center every time, and hain't afeerd o' man, grizzly, Injun, road-agent, or ther devil."

"He hev rid rides when thar was a regimint o' Injuns on ther trail, and when outlaws was a-reposin' in ambush ter pick him off."

"I has seen him in a scrimmage, and I knows jist what he kin do."

"He went East some time ago, givin' up Pony Ridin', and now comes ag'in at ther old trade, and ef he don't make this kentry howl, I am a liar from Wayback."

"Come, Sam, don't you intend to come to a full stop and let me get in a word?"

"Waal, Red Rider!"

"My advice to you is to push along, and as the moonlighters might head you off again between here and Jumping Off City, I'll hang back in the rear to give them another scare, if need be."

"You is right, I has got ter hump myself and no mistake."

"And your dead friend, sir, had better be put inside the coach, while you ride up with Sunset Sam."

"Yes, for I would like to take him to the fort for burial."

"The coaches stop at Jumping Off City, sir, and it's a rough trail from there; but you can bury him to-morrow at the mining-camp."

"Yes, I will do that, poor fellow," and the body of the dead man was placed in the coach, the officer mounted to the box with Sunset Sam, who at once sent his team forward at a lively pace.

Red Rider dropped back in the rear out of sight, and thus the run was made into Jumping Off City.

But before the camps were reached Red Butterfly rode alongside and said:

"You had better stay in Jumping Off City, sir, until I send an escort from the fort after you."

"I will do so, my young friend, for I wish to take no more chances," replied the paymaster.

"You are all safe now, sir, for there is the camp."

"I will report your coming to the commandant and ask him to send an escort for you."

"Sam, I'll meet you on the trail many a time, I guess," and with a wave of the hand the Pony Rider was gone and went flying along the trail like a bird.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RED RIDER ARRIVES.

"So the cheering is for the coming of the Indian Pony Rider, Cody?" said Colonel Seeley, as the scout entered.

"Yes, sir, he was recognized by the lookout on the tower, and his name was called out."

"The men at once began to gather at the stockade to meet him and gave cheers for his coming, fer he is v-ry popular with all at the fort, Colonel Seeley."

"And deservedly so, Cody; but I must detain you awhile, as Surgeon Powell is to go with you, and you and your men are to escort him as far as Dismal City."

"Yes, sir," and Buffalo Bill showed no surprise at the colonel's words.

"Go and prepare for your journey, Surgeon Powell, and then report here when I will have this Red Rider to give you what information you may wish."

"But both of you had better go to welcome him, and you bring him here with you, Cody, while Surgeon Powell is getting ready."

The two saluted the commandant and left headquarters, going at once to the stockade gate whither had gathered half the garrison.

The rapid clatter of hoofs was heard, and as the surgeon and the scout reached the stockade entrance, up dashed Go-won-go, the Red Rider.

A wild cheer greeted him as he rode into the fort, and he acknowledged it by raising his black sombrero, upon which was embroidered in scarlet and gold a red butterfly.

His horse was hot and panting like a hound from his long and rapid run, yet seemed good for many miles yet.

"Welcome, Red Rider, and I am glad to see you back at the fort once more," said Surgeon Powell, grasping the hand of the Indian Rider warmly.

"I am glad to see you all once more, Surgeon Powell, and I am on the trail again to stay until my work is crowned with success," was the response of the Indian, and he greeted Buffalo Bill in the same friendly way.

Lieutenant Andrew Ames, who had been with him upon the raid after Quantrel and his men, now came up and shook hands with the red-skin hero, while other officers did the same.

An orderly was called and led his horse away, while Buffalo Bill told him that Colonel Seeley wished him to come at once to the headquarters, so the two walked off together.

When they entered the room Colonel Seeley was not alone, for his daughter was there, having come from her room near by to learn the cause of the cheering.

When one gazed into the handsome, beautiful face of Alice Seeley he would at once admit that it was no wonder that men loved her.

She gazed with the deepest interest upon the Indian youth, as he entered with the scout, while the colonel said in his pleasant way:

"I am glad to meet one of whom I have heard so much, my young Indian friend, and to know that you are here to again ride the Pony Express."

"I thank you, sir, and I would ask you for the place of Pony Rider between the fort and Jumping Off City, for the Overland Company have given me permission to make the extra ride, if you would engage me?"

"I will gladly do so, Mr. Go-won-go, for I believe that is your name."

"Go-won-go, why, I knew a lovely Indian girl by that name, at—"

"At school in the East, miss, you would say."

"Yes, that was my sister," said the Indian youth, while Alice Seeley rejoined, as her face changed color:

"Your sister?"

"She was a dear friend to me, and had she not left school as she did, I would never have won first honors."

"I am indeed glad to know you, sir."

She held forth her hand and the Red Butterfly took it in an embarrassed way, and turned quickly to Colonel Seeley who remarked:

"The place of Pony Rider is yours, Go-won-go, and glad am I to give it to you, though I cannot but regret the peril you have to face, greater even than when you before rode."

"I will take all chances, Colonel Seeley; but I brought some mail with me which arrived at Dismal City as Sunset Sam's coach had left."

"I will return to Jumping Off City to-night, sir, and bring the mail he has for the fort there."

"But you must be fatigued after your long journey, so there is no hurry."

"I had best return, sir, and permit me to say that Paymaster Birney is along with the coach, and will wait in Jumping Off City for you to send an escort after him, as he brings considerable money."

"Good! then he is there is he, safe and sound?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am indeed glad to hear this news, for I was most anxious about Birney," and as Surgeon Powell entered just then and all was in readiness for the start of Buffalo Bill and his scouts, they received their orders from the commandant and departed, Frank Powell remarking:

"You will find your horses in charge of my man, Red Rider, and I suppose you will soon have them at their stations?"

"I shall start to-night, sir, leaving one here, one at Jumping Off City, another at Miner's Roost, a fourth at the stage relay station and the sixth at Dismal City," was Red Rider's response, and having had food and rest he left the fort at nightfall with his horses following, excepting the animal he had ridden to the fort that day, and which was to be stationed there.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INDIAN DETECTIVE.

THE letter of the Indian Rider of the Overland to Surgeon Powell told the story of the kidnapping of Daniel Darwin, the mad miner, from the asylum.

It also told that the Indian youth was to give up his position as a professional shot, traveling to make money to support the mad miner and himself, and take the trail of the kidnappers at once.

Acting promptly, Go-won-go had gone to New York and thence to the asylum, where a long interview had been held with Doctor Dunn.

The letter which held Doctor Sayres Mott's

name to it was secured, and a full description of the two men, the carriage and horses was jotted down.

Then, without aid from Secret Service men, the Indian began to be his own detective.

He could trail a moccasined foot out on the plains, but could he track a man in the crowded city?

He at least meant to try.

He put on his thinking-cap, and with dates and data went to work to find which way the carriage went.

It took him two days to track it to Yonkers, and he took the boat which it was said the kidnappers boarded with their victim.

"Yes, three men did board at Yonkers, buying tickets for Albany, and, I afterward learned, going ashore at Nyack," said the captain.

Go-won-go got the description of the men from the captain, mate and porter, and placed them as the trio he was after.

He, too, landed at Nyack, and was not long in discovering that the men had hired a vehicle there to drive out into the country somewhere.

"Where did they go?"

"I do not know; they paid me handsomely, and the driver was called home to his sick wife the moment he got back, and I never asked him."

"Where is the driver?"

"At home still."

"Hitch up a horse and drive me there."

This was done, and the driver was found and interviewed.

He said that the men had driven to a station on the Erie Railroad.

Go-won-go returned to the stable and ordered a team to take him to that station.

There he found that a ticket had been bought for the West.

He asked the time the train passed and the conductor's name, dismissed the vehicle and waited.

He caught the train, found it was the conductor he wanted, and learned that, although having tickets to Chicago, the trio had left the train some hours after getting on it.

He discovered from the brakeman, who saw them get off, the station where they left, and he got off there, too.

There they had taken a carriage and driven to another town.

It was evident that the kidnappers were sparing no money to cover up their tracks.

He found the driver of the vehicle, and securing a buggy went to the same place.

It was no easy task to track the fugitives, but Go-won-go was equal to the work he had cut out for himself.

At last he found that their trail led to Chicago, and he followed it there.

After a couple of days' search he found that three men, answering the description of the kidnappers and their victim, had started for the far West, buying tickets to the terminus of the railway at that time.

Convincing himself that there could be no mistake, that the trio described were those he was after, he started upon his return to the East, arranged his business affairs, drew all the money he had in the bank, and again started upon the trail.

Reaching Chicago, he again questioned those who had seen the men, and then bought a ticket for himself to the terminus.

The trail ended at Council Bluffs, it seemed, for he found much difficulty there in finding his men; but by questioning all the drivers of the coaches, found one who had picked up three men beyond Omaha and driven them to a corral station, where they had purchased horses and a complete outfit for traveling by horseback.

Questioned closely the driver had said the men had seemed to join him beyond Omaha to prevent being discovered to have bought tickets there on the Overland stage-route.

So Go-won-go got a ticket and rode to the corral station, and there found it was just as the driver had said about the fugitives.

Purchasing a couple of horses for himself, one to carry the extensive pack of luggage he had with him, Go-won-go was about to start on the trail when he was joined by a fellow with a cut-throat looking face, who frankly admitted that he wanted a partner in a "leettle business transaction on ther road."

Keen as a brier the Indian chimed in with the man's idea, and though not flattered that he had selected him to aid him in a murderous proposition, got the whole story and said:

"Oh, yes, I'm for making money and I'll chip in with you, and am ready to go on the trail at once."

"Waal, red-skin pard, yer see I holds ther secret and that are all, for I is dead broke."

"You has got two hosses, I noticed, and is about ter go on a trail alone."

"Now I made bold ter ask yer ter let me ride one, and chip in with me in ther biz I has in view, as it be a leettle more than one man kin bite off and chaw convenient, so it's a go that you helps."

"I'm with you, pard," was the firm response of Go-won-go.

CHAPTER XX.

A HORSE TRADE.

GO-WON-GO had no desire to make his pack-horse do double duty by carrying his luggage and a rider to boot.

A horse was something that could be turned into money at any time, so he decided to get another animal.

So he stated to his new-found friend and was told of a splendid animal he could buy.

"The truth are, Pard Injun, ther horse be mine; but I are a durned fool."

Red Rider did not contradict the man in this statement, but simply asked how it was that he had come to that conclusion.

"It were this way, Pard Red-skin."

"I am a miner, yer know."

"You look it."

"Waal, I got a leettle dust dug, and c'u'dn't work any more, so I came back on the trail ter spend it."

"I got inter this place with only a leettle left, and lost that with ther boys, so, as I had ter go ter Council Bluffs, I borrowed money on my horse, which are a beaut'."

"I went ter ther Bluffs and thar heerd what I tells yer, and only had money enough ter git back here, on my way ter head 'em off."

"Yer see, I intended ter borrow my horse back ag'in and light out."

"I see."

"But ther feller kinder sized me up, I guesses, for ther moment he seen me back in ther camps ag'in, a-lookin' kinder mournful, he jist tuk ther horse inter ther house with him at night."

"He must have been a mind-reader."

"Waal, he seen through my leettle joke afore I told it, and I were a-plannin' ter take pie ef I c'u'dn't git puddin'."

"How do you mean?"

"As I c'u'dn't git my splendid horse, I were goin' ter borrow another critter, yer see."

"Yes."

"Then I seen you, and concluded, as you was a peert-lookin' Injin, I'd brace you."

"You did right, my friend, and I shall never cease thanking you; but now tell me how much you got for your horse?"

"See here, pard, yer don't talk and act like a Injin, though yer has got a red skin."

"Thank you."

"Yer has been eddicated, and yer is chipper enough for a gal."

"Again, thank you."

"Yer is put up clean as a thoroughbred, but then I knows Injins from 'way back, and I says ter myself if he's red-skin it are in him ter kill and rob, so I'll brace him."

"I'll never cease thanking you, my friend."

"Call me by my name."

"What do you call yourself now?"

"Faro Frank—I'm a card-sharp, yer know."

"No, I didn't know; but now, how much will it take to buy your horse back again?"

"Are you going with me to pay the money, or is I going alone?"

"Does it make any difference?"

"Waal, yas."

"How so?"

"If I goes alone it are a hundred and twenty dollars."

"And if I go with you?"

"It's only a hundred, for ther twenty is my commish."

"Oh, I see."

"Well, as I am not rich I'll save the commission and go with you; but if you wish twenty dollars to fit up a little for the trail, here it is."

"I'm blest if you hain't a dandy."

"Maybe yer hain't a Injun, only stained?"

"I am a full-blooded Indian, Faro Frank."

"Now let us see that horse."

Faro Frank led the way to the home of the man who had loaned him money on his horse, and that he was sorry to see the owner come for him was plain, for he had hoped to keep the splendid animal.

And a splendid creature he was, black as jet, long, slender-bodied and with the cleanest of limbs.

"You are a good judge of horseflesh, Faro Frank."

"Now be I not, Injun pard?"

"I tells yer Black Diamond, as I calls ther crittur, are a goer and stayer, and I w'u'dn't take five hundred o' no man's money for him."

"I knows him."

"He seems to know you too, though the regard is not mutual."

"See how he bites at you, while he is lamb-like toward me."

"Oh, he's got ther devil in him, and then Injuns is half-kin ter hosses anyhow," was Faro Frank's explanation.

The money was paid, the man offering to give another hundred and keep the horse, which Faro Frank seemed inclined to accept, until Go-won-go remarked:

"Don't be a fool, Faro Frank, for I'll give you the same any time, and you need the horse now."

"That's so," and the horse was led to Go-won-go's camp, when the latter said:

"As your horse seems so vicious toward you, and a mount is all you need, I'll give you my."

pack-animal for Black Diamond and fifty dollars to boot."

"It's a bargain, for that horse *don't* like me."

"Upon one condition, however?"

"Waal?"

"That you do not run off nor get drunk and gamble away the money."

"I'll be as you say, pard."

"If you do we'll lose the chance of all that money ahead on the trail."

"That's right; but when do you wish ter start?"

"At dawn, and we had best get a good night's rest."

"Right you are," said Faro Frank, and he counted over his money and said he was going to make some purchases.

Just before dawn he sneaked back again, drunk and penniless.

The "card-sharp" had played with some one who was a card sharper than himself.

Go-won-go said nothing, and soon after they rode off on the trail westward.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN OUTLAW'S MISTAKE.

FARO FRANK rode along in silent and painful meditation, after leaving camp.

He followed mechanically in the rear of the pack-horse, Go-won-go leading the way.

As day dawned Go-won-go smiled as he looked at his companion.

He was drunk clean through, and instead of having "fitted up" for the journey had even risked his coat for money to play another game at cards, hoping to win back what he lost.

The "purchases" he had said he was going to make were liquors, and he had not a cent left, while he sat on his horse rolling from side to side very drunk and asleep.

After sunrise the Red Rider halted and cooked breakfast.

As long as the horse moved with him, Faro Frank kept in the saddle, but the moment he halted he fell off.

It was all the same to him, for he lay where he had fallen, sleeping the sleep of the unjust.

Go-won-go put some bacon on the fire, a pot of coffee, and some potatoes in to roast.

Then he roused his companion by a trick, after in vain trying to do so in every other way.

"This is the man to be hanged, sheriff," he said, in a deep, stern voice, grasping the shoulder of the sleeper at the same time.

With a yell of terror Faro Frank sprung to his feet and shouted:

"Mercy, gentlemen, mercy!"

"What's the matter, pard?" asked the Red Rider with a laugh.

"Oh, Lord! but I had an awful dream, pard."

"Whar be we?" and the man was deadly pale now, his teeth chattering.

"On the trail; come, have a cup of hot coffee and it will sober you."

"Lordy! I hain't drunk, but I is sick."

"Yes, I thought you were not feeling well when I saw you come into camp this morning."

"But where is your coat?"

"I'm durned ef I knows. It's been stole."

"And the purchases you made?"

"Stole, too; yas, and all my money."

"I say, pard, I were drugged last night and robbed."

"Just what I thought; but, drink your coffee, and we'll go again on the trail, for you remember what is ahead of us."

"That's so, Injun; but what a head I has on me this mornin'."

"It's the same head, only swelled."

After an hour's rest they were mounted and went on their way, Go-won-go riding his new purchase of Black Diamond, and with the one now serving as pack-animal, owning two splendid specimens of horseflesh.

"Where are your guns, Faro Frank?" asked Go-won-go, as he saw that the man's belt-of-arms was also gone.

"I were robbed of 'em all, pard."

"That is bad."

"But hain't yer got a extra gun or two yer kin lend me?"

"Yes. I don't wish to have you unarmed, for there is no telling what one may meet."

"I haven't a knife, but here is a belt and a couple of revolvers, and a rifle you'll hardly need."

"Thet's so, for you has a dandy thar, I sees. They is loaded, hain't they?"

"Oh, yes; see!"

"I loaded them last night."

Faro Frank saw the points of the bullets in the revolvers, and buckled the belt on with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Them robbers cleaned me out, but I feels prime now I has these guns on me," he said.

"Yes; this is no country to go unarmed through," was Go-won-go's quiet response.

As the country was a dangerous one, not only from Indians prowling along the trails, but outlaws, it was decided that they should travel from dawn until darkness set in, and, when camping, one of them should watch half the night, then awake the other to take his place.

As for the trail which the Red Rider was following, of the kidnappers and their victim, he

seemed to know where to strike it again, for he paid no heed to tracking them.

They had left the corral station on horseback and started upon a trail which ran parallel with the Overland.

So several days passed until Red Butterfly, who had told Faro Frank he would let him know the best place to carry out their plans, whatever they might be, said to him one evening:

"Now, pard, Dismal City lies yonder about twenty miles, and our chance will be to strike the Overland between there and Miner's Roost."

"Yas, pard."

"There were two of them, you say?"

"Yas."

"Now tell me all over again what you heard them say, and about the two men, for we must make no mistake."

"You bet we mustn't."

"Now give me the story again."

"Waal, as I said, I were at ther shanty whar they put up, and they met a brother-officer thar it seems, who had just come up from New Mexico."

"They said as how they hed plenty o' Government cash, and were skeered about going through with it on 'em, since the road-agents hed been raisin' thunder on ther Overland."

"Then ther man from New Mexico spoke up and said as how he wu'd tell 'em of a racket thet would take 'em through O. K."

"And his plan?"

"Were ter dress up as dead-broke miners and beat ther way along, carryin' ther money with 'em all ther same."

"Waal, they laughed over it and concluded ter play ther game."

"So I got a good look at 'em, and then figured out ter find out when they was ter start."

"I heerd ther paymaster say he were waitin' fer orders and money from Washington, with papers too, and he did not think they would git away under a month, as he had orders ter wait until a certain date, when they would arrive."

"He named the date?"

"He said it were ther seventh, a leetle less than a month."

"I see, and you know the names of the officers?"

"One were Paymaster Birney, and I disremembered his pard and ther name o' ther one from New Mexico."

"Well, we can strike Dismal City to-morrow and learn if two such men have gone through, and then lie in wait for them on the trail from there to Miner's Roost."

"Correct you are, pard."

"Travel at this time is light, and there will hardly be more than two or three in the coach, if they go that way, while if they go by horseback they will be alone; but we must keep our eyes on the trail for whoever may pass."

"Yas; but let me tell you somethin' I forgot."

"Yes?"

"Thet feller from New Mexico, in my opinion, wasn't no officer."

"Ah!"

"I thinks he were a-playin' it on 'em."

"Why do you think so?"

"Waal, I ust ter know Cap'n Quantrel, an' ef thet wasn't him then I doesn't know a face when I sees it ag'in," and the words of the outlaw fairly made the Red Butterfly start.

CHAPTER XXII.

FARO FRANK'S PLAN.

TRAINED as he was to show no emotion, no sign, the Indian youth had been betrayed into a start at the words of his companion.

But he was perfectly calm in an instant and asked:

"So you knew Quantrel, did you?"

"Waal, I did."

"Where?"

"I were his spy at Overland Forks, until he got wiped out by Buffalo Bill and his scouts."

"I see, and you had to go to work then?"

"Yas, I kinder lost my grip when I heerd he war dead, and then I concluded it were a mistake."

"But he was killed, I heard."

"I never has believed it, for he kinder allus got out o' a scrape."

"And now I believes it less since I seen thet man who were a-playin' officer on them army chaps."

"Why didn't you find out if it was Quantrel?"

"Waal, I did intend ter, only I didn't wish ter make no bad break, but go cautious."

"You were right, Frank."

"I allus is."

"Except when you bet on the wrong card."

"Waal, it do happen that I do go wrong on keerds."

"But tell me of this man you thought was Quantrel."

"He were not alone, and were dressed as a officer."

"Who were his companions?"

"He said as how he had a crazy brother with him he were takin' home, and a sergeant were along ter help him."

"I see, and I guess you were mistaken."

"I guess not, for though he did take ther stage east, he got out and went west, as I heerd ther driver say himself, and the more I has thought it over the more sure I is that it were Quantrel."

"And if it was?"

"Waal, his raidin'-place is beyond Dismal City, and maybe he'll be on ther trail ter hold up them two soldiers."

"You are right, and our best plan is to keep near Dismal City."

"You is right it is, pard; but you goes on watch ther first ter-night."

"Yes, and I'll turn in soon," answered Red Butterfly, yawning as though very tired.

Soon after he spread his blankets and turned in, going to sleep instantly, it seemed.

Faro Frank then went on duty as guard.

Their camp was in a valley, and the three horses were staked near, feeding upon the juicy grass that was most plentiful there.

The camp-fire back in a ravine burned dimly, and Faro Frank took his position where he could see up and down the valley, keeping the horses in view.

As he stood there, he mused to himself, and, apparently, pleasantly, though the subject of his musings were not of a cheerful nature, as they ran in this wise:

"Now I think things has jumped jist my way."

"This Injun hev got money in plenty, I is sart'in, and though he be a cheerful pard, and knows what he are about, his money be wu'th more ter me than his comp'ny."

"I might wait until I had struck them army fellers, and then play my leetle game; but then it were best ter hold on to ther bird in ther hand then go nosin' round for them as is in ther bushes."

"Now he hev got money, and weepens, and three horses, with other truck, and I hed better take what are in my hands, and run ther chances o' doin' t'other business alone."

"Yas, my time are ter act now, and not wait no longer, so here goes."

With this resolve Faro Frank started over to where Go-won-go lay.

"I only wish I hed a knife, fer I don't wish ter shoot a gun off here."

"But I hesn't got a carver, and ef I tried ter git his, why, he's a Injun, and I'd hev ter fight fer it, for they sleeps wide awake."

"I'll jest creep up, pertendin' it are his time ter stand guard, and then plant ther bullets in-ter him."

With this murderous resolve Faro Frank moved cautiously forward.

The idea of pity never entered his heart.

To kill an Indian with him was no more than to shoot a wolf, and it is doubtful if it had been a white man he would have felt repugnance at the act.

He was one of those who believed, no matter what his acts might be, mankind owed him a living.

So he was going to do some red work to keep up this opinion.

The Red Butterfly lay as still as a mouse, and seemed not disturbed in his slumber by the presence of danger.

Nearer and nearer crept the assassin, his revolver now in his hand and cocked.

The slightest movement would have caused the outlaw to pull trigger and begin to fire until his victim was dead.

Nearer and nearer he crept, the flickering fire showing the form beneath the blankets to be as motionless as death.

Over the camp hung the branches of a large tree, and all around a certain circle of firelight was cast in shadow.

The man paused, not from pity, but to be sure of his aim.

He wished to get nearer, for though, in a stand-up fight, his hand would have been as firm as iron, the very act of his sneaking up to kill made him tremulous.

Nearer and nearer he crept until he was within fifteen feet of the form lying so still.

He paused and drew a long breath.

Then he aimed his revolver.

But, shaking his head, as though afraid of the distance, he moved one, two, three paces nearer.

Again he raised his revolver, to again lower it with a shake of his head.

Then he stepped five paces nearer, and his revolver-muzzle was but a few feet from the prostrate form as he pulled trigger.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SURPRISE.

WHEN Faro Frank began to shoot, he determined to make sure that there should be no mistake.

If any one was within hearing, one shot would make his presence known as well as several, so he decided to fire until certain there was no doubt of his victim's death.

The form seemed to flinch under the first shots, then remained motionless.

"I has done it," coolly said the outlaw.

"Done what, pard?"

Faro Frank uttered a yell of terror, for the voice came from behind him.

Then, too, it was the voice of his supposed victim.

As he turned in fright, he found himself covered, and heard the words:

"Hands up, Pard Frank, for your revolver carries no bullet—*mine does.*"

Then came a prompt and able-bodied lie:

"I know'd it wasn't loaded; I were jist a-wakin' yer up ter go on guard."

"Yes? Well, I'll just stay on guard."

"Hands up, I say!"

"Yer hain't a-goin' ter treat me foul?"

"Oh no, I'm going to do the right thing by you."

"There, sir, lie right down there on your face."

"But, pard—"

"Do you hear?"

"I hears, but—"

"My gun is loaded, and if you don't obey, I'll kill you."

"Oh Lord!" groaned the villain; but he obeyed.

"Now put your hands up over your back."

"What does yer want?"

"To kill you if you do not obey."

The hands were placed behind, and bending over, Red Butterfly slipped a pair of handcuffs upon him quick as a flash.

"Say, Injun, what's them?"

"Handcuffs."

"Oh Lord!"

Taking a lariat then he held on his arm, Red Butterfly fastened it around the man's arms securely and then tied him to one of the branches of the tree, but with a length that allowed him to sit down by the camp-fire.

"Say, Injun, you is goin' back on me."

"Oh no, you went back on me, Frank."

"I suspected you the moment you took me for a villain, and I chipped in with you."

"I was glad to have company this way and thought I could use you, and we would get on together all right."

"But something told me not to trust you, and I didn't."

"When you supposed I was sleeping every night I was watching you, but always ready when you came for me to take my turn."

"To-night I was sure you meant to kill me, so I rigged up that dummy there in my blankets, and got up on that limb."

"You soon showed your hand, and I let you empty your revolver into my blankets, for I had loaded it with tin-foil wrapped around cotton for bullets."

"Now, I know your whole game, and we'll ride on into Dismal City to-night, when I'll give you over to the agent there of the Overland stages to keep until you are wanted."

"Wanted fer what?"

"The hangman," was the calm rejoinder.

Faro Frank groaned, but he rallied quickly and said:

"See here, pard, let up on me and I go halves in all I makes."

"Pon my word I will."

"No, I wish no partnership with a villain unless it is to entrap him."

"If I delivers Quantrel up to you will you let me go free?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I kin do it."

"You cannot, for you have told me all that you know about Quantrel."

"Now I shall get the horses ready and move for Dismal City."

"Who is yer anyhow?"

"I am known on the Overland as Red Butterfly, the Pony Rider."

"Oh, Lord! I ought ter hev know'd it, for I has heard o' yer time and ag'in."

"But they said yer was dead."

"Thank you, no, I enjoy the best of health," and the Pony Rider went on with his work.

He soon had the saddles on and aiding the prisoner to mount followed suit and led the way to Dismal City.

The agent, or "boss" as he was called, of the Overland stages, had his cabin near the stables, and seeming to know where to find him, Red Butterfly rode right there.

A call aroused the boss, and, coming out, he asked:

"Who is it?"

"Red Butterfly, Boss Curry, and I am here to ride again, bringing a letter from the superintendent."

"The Lord bless you, Red Rider, I am glad to see you again, for I never thought to do so."

"And you are to take the trail from here to Fort Venture again?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's worse than ever; but you are the one to slip through and save your scalp."

"But, who is your pard?"

"A gentleman whom I would like to introduce to you as Faro Frank."

"He cannot shake hands with you, as he has iron bracelets on; but I will tell you about him."

And Red Butterfly led his prisoner into the cabin of the Overland agent, and then told the

story of their coming together and the attempted assassination of himself.

But he said nothing about the plot of Faro Frank to head off the paymaster and rob him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RED BUTTERFLY GOES TO WORK.

THAT Red Butterfly said nothing about the intention to rob the paymaster and his friend, Faro Frank took particular notice and smiled inwardly.

He offered no excuse for his act of assassination, and heard Red Butterfly's story through.

"Well, you are an unmitigated villain!" said Boss Curry, looking grimly at him.

"Appearances is deceitful, boss," was the reply.

"Yes; but actions speak, and you would have killed Red Butterfly, here, if he had not been too sharp for you."

"That's his say; but I knew the guns he give me wasn't loaded, and I were jist a-jokin' ter wake him up with a big scare."

"Well, you got the scare when he woke up. But I must see to you."

"What yer goin' ter do with me?"

"If I whispered it around what you were, the boys would save all trouble and expense, for they would hang you, and gladly, for there hasn't been a string-up here in Dismal City for over a month now."

"How unfortinit, boss."

"But I don't wish to give you up to the boys, so I'll just keep you in a place I have for just such fellows as you are, until I can send you back to Council Bluffs for trial as a confessed spy of Quantrel, for they will know you at Overland Forks, where you said you were."

"I was never thar in my life."

"I jist lied, fer I doesn't know Quantrel."

"Not now, because he is dead; but I shall hold on to you, so come now."

Boss Curry then carried his prisoner to the cabin of the guard in the corral, where the horses were kept.

Here were two men kept constantly, one man always on guard over the stage-horses.

"Buck, keep this fellow in your cabin, and let no one know he is here."

"He is ironed, and you can easily watch him," said Curry, and forthwith Faro Frank found himself indeed a prisoner and no ray of escape presenting itself.

Returning to his cabin, he said:

"Now, Butterfly, we must have a chat, for you have more to tell me?"

"Yes, in strictest confidence."

"Certainly."

"Have you noticed two men pass through Dismal City lately, pretended miners and playing broke?"

"They were here two days ago, and walked to Miner's Roost, where they said they had friends who would give them a lift on Sunset Sam's coach."

"Sam is now here?"

"Yes, and pulls out at daybreak—just an hour from now."

"Do not tell him I am here."

"All right; but about those two men?"

"I'll tell you that they are not what they seem, that they have money, and are playing a part to keep from being robbed."

"Ah! they are clever."

"Now I am going to protect these men, Boss Curry, and Sunset Sam must not know who they are."

"I have reason to believe they will be held up on the trail, if they have not already been, and so I'll be ready to start at noon on my ride to the fort."

"Then you'll get the mail that comes in on the coach, which Sam cannot wait for and make his run through on time."

"All right, I am here for work, and you will see by the superintendent's letter that I am to go at in my own way."

"Yes, he says you are to be let alone to take your own time for your rides, and to go and come when you please."

"There is something up, Red Butterfly, for you are a detective as well as a Rider."

"I am cutting out certain work, Boss Curry, that I hope to accomplish."

"Now tell me if you have seen three men go through on the coach, one a tall, heavily-bearded man, well-dressed, another a thick-set fellow with red hair and beard, and the third an invalid, apparently, with gray hair and beard, though not an old man?"

"No, I have seen no such men pass."

"All right, they have not gone by coach."

"I mean in the past few weeks?"

"No, for I have seen every passenger that went through one way or the other."

"Those you ask about, who were playing broke, came here by coach, but walked, as I told you, to Miner's Roost, where they hoped to find some one to give them another lift on wheels to Jumping Off City."

"This was two days ago?"

"Yes."

"Well, as there is no Pony Rider on this end of the line, I suppose my old quarters are vacant?"

"Just as you left them, so turn in when you please."

"I'll be up in time to take the trail at noon, and I'll ride my black horse."

"The roan also is mine, but the gray belongs to the prisoner, Faro Frank, for I traded with him."

"He won't need him."

"Then sell him for him and give him the money to make himself comfortable while he lives, for he'll have to hang, Boss Curry."

"Sure."

"Keep him here until my return ride, and then maybe I can give you some news about him."

"I'll not send him East until you give the word."

So Red Butterfly went to the little cabin of the Pony Riders and was soon fast asleep.

But he was up before noon, had a good breakfast, and the surprised people of Dismal City knew not that he had returned until they saw the well-known face and form flash through the camps on his splendid horse Black Diamond on the run to Fort Venture, and bets were at once made that he would never reach the end of the trail.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TWO PARDS.

HAVING now shown how it was that Red Butterfly happened upon the trail in the very nick of time to save the life of Paymaster Birney and save him from losing the Government money in his possession, I will now return to the departure of the scouts from the fort.

It will be recalled that Surgeon Frank Powell accompanied them, going upon a supposed leave of absence for an indefinite time, and yet really to go upon Secret Service to help the Red Butterfly solve the mystery as to whether Quantrel, the outlaw chief, was living or dead.

"Well, Bill, the Red Rider has really come," said the surgeon, as he and his boon pard, Cody, rode along side by side after leaving the fort.

"Sure; and I almost regret it."

"Why?"

"He cannot always escape."

"Well, he has taken chances that few would do; but I have an abiding faith, as I have before said, in his escaping death."

"Well, I hope so; but what effect will his riding have upon those ambushers?"

"How do you mean?"

"As long as the Pony Riders went through and gave them a chance to kill and rob them, it was all right."

"Yes."

"The escort they feared to tackle."

"True."

"And for some reason they would not kill me, though I believe they have had the chance."

"Without doubt they have, and my idea about their sparing you is that your death would raise such a pow-wow that they would be driven at once from the country, and that they do not wish."

"You are complimentary, Frank; but I think the leader may be some one who knows me, whom, perhaps, I have done a good turn for some day, and thus I escaped."

"I had not thought of that, and, now you suggest it, that must be the reason."

"It is a plausible reason, at least, knowing these wild characters as we do, and that, no matter how wicked, they have some good trait that clings to them."

"But, about Red Butterfly's riding?"

"Yes."

"Will it make them again threaten Miss Seeley's life?"

"Ah!"

"If they do not kill him, as they hope to, I fear it will make them more ugly to see him escape them, and they might again make the threat against her."

"They might, that is true."

"And if they do?"

"Well, all the colonel can do is to see that she is protected, for the Pony Rider must go through."

"Yes; but have you thought how strange it is that we can never find any trace of the men who ambush this trail?"

"I have thought of it often, Bill, and have in vain looked for a solution; but I hope now that we can get at the bottom of the mystery."

"How?"

"I mean now that Red Butterfly has returned, and I am going again upon Secret Service."

"I see."

"We work well together, as you know, and then I have you as an ally openly, while I remain unknown."

"We will decide upon a spot between Jumping Off City and Miner's Roost, where letters can be left for you, or for myself, and you must have a scout to go there twice a week, at least, but let no one into the secret except our League of Nine."

"That is right."

"I will try to get to the letter rendezvous on Mondays and Thursdays, so have your man take

those days for coming, and let him never leave before sunset, as I may meet him then."

"I'll see to it that it is as you wish."

"But where will you see Red Rider?"

"On the trail somewhere, as I gave him to understand before I left the fort."

"He seems firmly convinced that Quantrel yet lives."

"He has reason to think so, and he does not go far wrong in what he decides upon."

"But I am glad Paymaster Birney got through safe to Jumping Off City with his life and money."

"Yes, his capture would have been a rich haul indeed for road-agents."

"Well, he's safe now, as you will escort him back to the fort."

"After I have escorted you to Dismal City?"

"No, I'll go it alone from Jumping Off City, so you return with Birney."

"As you say, Frank; but in uniform as you are, and alone, you'll be a splendid mark for an outlaw who may think you have plenty of money with you."

"I'll do as Red Butterfly does."

"How is that?"

"Take the chances," was the cool rejoinder of the Surgeon Scout.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PAYMASTER'S FRIEND.

THE arrival of Buffalo Bill and his scouts was well timed, though by accident, as they entered the mining-camps known as Jumping Off City.

Like Dismal City, it had been well named, for it was the terminus of the coach line, and beyond it was an unknown wilderness, except in the direction of the fort, and that trail had been the end of many a brave life.

Of course there was a hotel there, or what claimed to be one.

It was known as "The Mine," and was one to its proprietor.

It was here that Paymaster Birney arrived late in the night on Sunset Sam's coach, while within was the dead body of his comrade and clerk, poor Todd Veasey.

The paymaster had told Sunset Sam that he wished to still preserve his incognito, and having explained what that word meant, the driver replied:

"Oh, yas, pard, jist keep on bein' dead broke, fer yer hain't at yer trail's end yet, and thar be plenty o' men in Jumping Off City who would go fer yer in a minute, while it w'd take a whole comp'ny o' cavalry ter escort yer ter Fort Venture, ef they know'd yer was loaded with greenbacks."

"No, yer jist keep on bein' what yer pertends ter be, dead broke and no 'count."

This advice the paymaster followed, and he could not have gotten lodgings at The Mine, if Sunset Sam hadn't said he would square the board bill.

The body of the dead clerk, too, was to be cared for, and Sunset Sam told the landlord of The Mine:

"Give it a room all to itself, and I has an army uniform I'll dress it up in, fer ther feller were a game one, and durn me ef I don't see him planted in style."

"And I only wishes thet Parson Prim were here ter talk off Gospil over him."

"Hain't yer ever heerd o' ther parson ag'in, Sam?" asked Landlord Leary.

"Not since the Red Buzzards was wiped out hes he showed himself in these parts, and there do be folks believe thet ther fighting parson were kilt."

"But, somehow, I don't believe it."

"Nor me, fer no man hain't goin' ter shoulder sich a load ter carry as killin' a parson."

"It w'd give him wuss luck than ter kill a woman or a kid."

"Yer is right, Pard Leary; but, mind yer, treat thet corpse first-rate and yer gits my money fer it, and give ther live tramp ther best room and vittals yer has got, fer I hes ther dust ter squar' ther bill."

Under these circumstances, Paymaster Birney got a good room, as the rooms of The Mine went, and the body of poor Veasey was placed in good quarters and rigged up in a uniform which belonged to him, though Sam claimed it, having the luggage of the two soldiers sent to his room.

The next morning it became known all over the camps that Sunset Sam's coach had been "held up" on its run up to Jumping Off City, and one passenger killed.

Nor was this the only story floating around, as Sunset Sam told the story of how Red Butterfly was again riding the Pony Express, and had come along and frightened the moonlighters off.

He told, too, that this new band of road-agents were pleased to be known as "The Moonlighters," and the coming of Red Rider had saved a valuable freight he had along.

Just what that valuable freight was Sunset Sam did not say, and no one suspected the paymaster of being worth ten cents.

As the driver seemed to wish the dead passenger to have a good send-off to the grave, the miners, ever anxious to please Sunset Sam, who was a hero of heroes in Jumping Off City, turned out in force for the funeral.

Sam's particular friends acted as pall-bearers, and the driver went with Paymaster Birney as chief mourners.

These two led the procession, and Sunset Sam felt the importance of the occasion, having, as it were, prepared the corpse for the entertainment, for such it was to the miners.

Paymaster Birney had lost a good friend and an efficient aide in his clerk, and his heart was sorrowful indeed as he walked toward the graveyard of Jumping Off City, and which had not inappropriately been named "Sinners' Roost."

But whatever the character of a man alive in Jumping Off City, dead he was respected as one who had solved the secret of the grave, and he was saved and a good funeral was given him.

As Sunset Sam remarked in a low tone to Paymaster Birney:

"Now w'dn't it tickle him ter death ter see ther send-off ther boys is givin' him?"

"I tells yer, pard, a dead man are respected in this town."

The paymaster accepted the good intentions of the crowd, and remained silent.

Had he been able to have gotten the body to the fort to have a military funeral, he would have been glad, but, as it was, poor Veasey had to be buried with the hurrah of a mining-camp, well meant though it was.

"I will recite the service of the dead over him," whispered the paymaster to Sunset Sam, and the latter was pleased, for he did not like to see a man placed in the ground without what he called in all reverence:

"A interduction to ther Almighty as he struck ther trail fer Glory-land."

When at last the blanketed form of Todd Veasey was laid in the grave, and the deep, impressive voice of the paymaster fell upon the ears of the miners, there was a deathlike silence.

He had dropped his assumed border dialect, and whatever the miners believed the man who looked so like a vagabond, his voice now impressed them as he recited with deep feeling the service for the dead, and then, in tones that had thrilled his army comrades many a time in bivouac and barracks, began to sing the words of

"Lead, kindly Light,
Lead Thou me on."

Here, there, a voice joined in, as hearts were touched, and soon the deep, rich voices of a score of rough miners swelled the refrain, and tears came to eyes that had long ceased to weep, and men were touched who long before had buried every sentiment and tender memory.

So impressed were all that they failed to notice a band of horsemen who had silently approached the spot, and sat upon their horses with uncovered heads, made to feel the touching scene, while they wondered what it all meant.

So was Todd Veasey buried, and men gazed at his vagabond comrade with a kind of awe as he turned and walked slowly back to the camps, whither the scouts had ridden as soon as the burial was over.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VELVET BILL.

THERE was hardly one man, who stood around the grave of Todd Veasey, listening to the musical, rich voice of Paymaster Birney, who was more deeply touched than was Sunset Sam.

And yet Sam knew the paymaster as he really was, and might have been prepared for his delivery of the burial service.

The others knew him only as a tramp in appearance, a rough-looking fellow who had seen hard times and gone utterly to the bad, but who had lost his pard and was in the hardest kind of luck.

When he turned away from the grave, they knew well that, whatever he then was he had seen better days.

There was the ring of education, refinement, in every utterance and expression, and this rough audience recognized it in him.

It touched them, and as Sunset Sam followed on after the stranger, whose name even they had not heard, and would not have believed his real one had he told them any, one of the miners called out:

"I say, pards."

All stopped, for the man who called to them was popular in Jumping Off City.

It was Velvet Bill, a man whose low voice, gentle manners and kindly ways had gained for him his name.

Velvet Bill was not a miner but an avowed gambler.

He lived at The Mine, had the best Jumping Off City afforded, gambled every night, and though a winner in nine cases out of ten, never took a man's last stake; nor would he play with one whom he knew to be poor and in hard luck.

He helped the needy always, and was a hand-

some, dashing young fellow, dressing like a cowboy dandy, and afraid of nothing on earth.

His courage had been put to the test time and again, and his deadly aim was well known in Jumping Off City.

In fact, not fifty paces from where he stood were five graves which his hand had caused to be dug, but to his credit be it said, that he was never the one to start the trouble.

"I say, pards," he said in his off-hand pleasant way.

"Waal, Velvet?" said one, and the miners all checked their progress and turned back.

"I only wish to say that Sunset Sam has done his part by the one who lies in this grave, and by his living comrade."

"Now the man stood here and recited the burial service over his dead pard, and sung that beautiful hymn, which I was glad to see so many of you knew, was no slouch."

"He's in hard luck and looks it, and when a man's down, cruel Fate often keeps him there."

"He's lost his pard now, and that is harder still on him, and I heard him say to Landlord Leary he was going away to-night or to morrow."

"Now, pards, into my hat here, out of my pocket, goes fifty dollars for that poor fellow, and though I don't ask any one of you, who work hard for your money while I get mine on my nerve only, to chip in any such sum, but I do say put up the best you can and it goes."

"Landlord Leary, come, no hedging, for you've got the dust."

The landlord would have escaped if he could, but saw that Velvet Bill had his eye on him, so said:

"I'll give him his board, Bill."

"This is no call for boarding-house hash, Leary, but for dust, and you know Sunset Sam puts up for his board."

"Put in liberally now."

Velvet Bill's eye held the landlord in bondage, and he threw a twenty dollar gold-piece into the hat.

Then the miners formed in a line and passed by, some throwing in liberally, all doing what they could with a cheerful heart, until the last man of over three hundred present had given something.

"Pards, I thank you most sincerely."

"You have done nobly, and if you don't save that poor fellow from his down-hill run by this act, I am mistaken in my man."

"He has gotten what for him now will be a fortune, for there are over five hundred dollars in this hat."

"Three cheers for Velvet Bill," cried one of the miners, and they were given with a will.

"Boys, I thank you, and my hat is off," said Velvet Bill, pleasantly, and he walked down toward the camps.

When he reached the hotel he saw Buffalo Bill and his scouts there, and saluted them, for he knew Cody, while he said:

"I've got a bat full of dust here for a poor devil what lost his pard on Sunset Sam's coach, and is dead broke besides."

"We just buried the dead man, and the boys chipped in generously for the live one."

"You should have been a parson, Velvet Bill, for you are always doing a good turn for some one," Buffalo Bill said, pleasantly.

"I am trying to offset the evil deeds I have been guilty of Cody," was the reply and the manner and voice of the gambler underwent a quick change, as though the cruelest of memories had suddenly flooded upon him.

But as quickly he smiled, bowed and passed on into the tavern, when Landlord Leary told him where he would find the stranger's room.

Sunset Sam was with him, the landlord also told the gambler, who walked quickly toward the room of the supposed vagabond.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MINERS' GIFT.

SUNSET SAM followed the paymaster to the tavern, and all along he felt as he had not felt before in a very long while, not since as a youth he stood by the side of the grave of the girl whose heart he had won in far-away Vermont, and who had died one short month before the day set for their marriage.

It had changed Sam Busby's life, made him wander afar from the old farm and drift to the frontier to become what he then was, a driver of the Overland.

"I declar', but thet man reached right down inter ther hearts o' us all, with thet s'arching, plaintive voice o' his."

"Durned ef I didn't see Velvet Bill a-weeplin'; yas, an' others, too, who I knows is cut-throats from Wayback."

So mused Sunset Sam as he hastened on after Paymaster Birney.

He found him in his room, standing at the window, watching the sun set behind the mountains.

"Come in, Sam, for I am glad to see you."

"I never thought of waiting to come back with you."

"Don't mind that, pard, for I seen yer felt."

what yer said and sung up yonder, and I thanks yer fer touchin' my heart, which I thought hed got hardened twenty year ago; but yer made me feel, and more of 'em, too."

"It was sad to lay poor Veasey there, Sam, for we have been friends for years, and his sister was my wife; but she only lived one short year, and much in her brother reminded me of her."

"A trifle wild he was, but true as steel to a friend, and twice has he risked his life to save mine, so I felt it cruelly to lay him there."

"You bet you did, pard; but yer made a better man o' me, durned ef yer didn't."

"But did yer see Surgeon Powell, Buffalo Bill and his boys?"

"Yes, and you must let Cody know I am here and to-night will leave the place, for he has doubtless been sent as my escort."

"I'll see him and tell him, only I wished ter speak to you, just about makin' yerself known, fer it would spile ther good yer has done with ther boys ef they didn't think yer what yer perfesses ter be."

"I am anxious not to throw off my disguise, Sam, as this same little game may do to play on another occasion if it is not known."

"Yer is right, pard."

"Then I will go on to the fort to-night with the scouts, and go as I am, so please tell Cody this, and Surgeon Powell, too, of course."

"I'll do it, and that's what I followed yer in here ter know— Come in!" and the last was called out in response to a knock at the door.

The door opened and Velvet Bill entered, bare-headed, his sombrero in his hand.

"Hello, Velvet Bill, does yer repent o' yer sins and wish ter shake hands with ther stranger as reminded yer of 'em?" called out Sunset Sam, when he saw who it was that entered.

"Yes, Sam, I came to shake hands with your stranger friend, and to thank him for his little talk up yonder on the hill, and his singing, for his voice reached my heart, and—well, sir, you may have the satisfaction of knowing that your coming has made us all better here in Jumping Off City, and as the boys wish to see you have luck in life, they chipped in some dust which I am to give you, and here it is."

The paymaster drew back as though he had been struck a blow, instead of having listened to kind words; but a warning look from Sunset Sam recalled him to himself, and he said quickly:

"You startle me, sir, for I am unused to such generosity, and I know not what to say or do," and he really looked confused.

"Well, my friend, you need not say more than you have, for what you did say up yonder shows you that human nature is the same the world over."

"Now what you must do is to take this money with the best wishes of the boys of Jumping Off City," and with this Velvet Bill coolly emptied the contents of his hat upon the cot-bed in the little room.

Strong, brave man that he was, Hugh Birney felt the tears come into his eyes at this unlooked-for termination of his adventure.

Refuse it he could not, after all that he had gone through to carry out his character as a vagabond.

So he said, and his voice quivered:

"Velvet Bill, for I know you by no other name, I thank you, and through you, your comrades, for their noble generosity on their part, and I assure you I shall prize every dollar of their generous offering, devoting it to the best of aims only, for I shall not long remain as you see me now."

"Again I thank you, sir," and Hugh Birney grasped the hand of the gambler, who said:

"I wish you luck, and if you like Jumping Off City stay here and I'll be your friend, and this means something here, as Sunset Sam will tell you."

"Indeed it do, pard, for you is squar' as they make 'em," was Sam's prompt indorsement of the gambler.

Then Velvet Bill and Sam took their leave together, while Paymaster Birney was left in amazement and a quandary.

There lay the money before him, all in a heap upon the blanket that served as the only covering for the cot.

Slowly he gathered it up, Velvet Bill's fifty-dollar bill, the landlord's twenty-dollar gold-piece, some bank-notes, some gold coins, considerable silver, and several little pouches of gold-dust.

He counted it carefully, estimating the gold-dust, and said:

"Six hundred and fifty dollars—a princely gift from these poor fellows, the rough diamonds of humanity."

"And every dollar shall go to some noble charity in their name; but now it is to get away to-night without being seen, for I must not be known as I am under any circumstances."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GANTLET RUN.

WHETHER it was that the burial services, as excited by the stranger, had so impressed the

miners of Jumping Off City that they wished to hear him again, I know not, but certain it was that darkness had hardly fallen upon the valley when there was a row in the gambling-room, and one man, nagged on by his comrades, who knew that they were forcing him to fool with a powder magazine, drew a weapon on Velvet Bill.

The drawing of that weapon was the last act of this man's life, for Velvet Bill never put down his cards, but slipped a derringer from his sleeve into his hand, and the one who was hastening to cover the gambler dropped dead.

"It's my game," coolly said Velvet Bill, laying his cards upon the table and raking in the money, but whether he referred to the game of cards or the game of life or death, no one seemed to exactly know.

Then he arose, and, facing those who had urged the dead man on, he said in his calm way:

"It was wrong for you to make that poor fellow draw on me, pards, for you knew what would follow, if he didn't."

"It was a coward act in all who did it, and I am here to back up my words."

A silence fell upon all present, but those who had been the ones to cause the trouble uttered no word, but swallowed the insult hurled in their teeth, and well was it for them they did.

This little episode was seen by Paymaster Birney, as he stood in his window awaiting the coming of Sunset Sam.

"That gambler is every inch a man," he muttered, as he saw Velvet Bill calmly resume his place at the table, with a—

"Beg pardon for delaying the game, gentlemen," to those whom he had been playing with.

Soon Sunset Sam entered and said:

"Velvet Bill has laid another man out, pard, but it were forced onter him by a lot o' fools who wants ter run Jumping Off City."

"I saw it, and Velvet Bill is a man to admire."

"Waal, now, be he; but yer won't remain over and plant ther remains?"

"No, thank you, Sam, I must be going," and the paymaster smiled at the invitation.

"I'm sorry; but I seen Buffalo Bill, and soon as they hed supper they started on ther trail, and we is ter jine 'em outside o' ther camps."

"They hes a led horse fer you, fer you is what they come fer; but I had one o' my critters saddled fer yer ter ride out to whar they be."

"You are indeed a good friend, Sam."

"I tries ter be squar' toward friend or foe; but yer has all yer dust?"

"Every bit of it."

"Good! Now we'll slip out quiet."

Sunset Sam led the way out to the coach-stables, and unseen, except by several of the stable-boys, the two mounted and rode out to the edge of the camps, where Buffalo Bill and his scouts awaited them.

Paymaster Birney had before been at Fort Venture, and so knew Buffalo Bill well, and greeted him warmly, as also his comrades.

"I'd have never known you, sir, and Sam tells me you have had a rough time of it," said the scout.

"Yes, I lost poor Veasey, Cody, but saved my money, thanks to that Indian Pony Rider you call Red Butterfly."

"Did he help you out, sir?"

"Yes, he saved my life and the Government money as Sam will tell you."

"Red Rider said nothing of this, sir, for he only told the colonel that you were here awaiting an escort to the fort."

"Well, he is a modest one, indeed; but I'll tell you the story as we ride along."

"Where is he now?"

"On his way back to Dismal City I suppose, sir, and we may meet him on the trail."

"I hope so, for he is a noble fellow; but where is Surgeon Powell, for I saw him with you?"

"He goes east with Sunset Sam to-morrow, sir, on a leave of absence."

"I am sorry I did not see him, but good-by, Sam, and many thanks for your kindness."

"Next time you see me I'll make myself known, for you would never recognize me, I am sure."

"You does look tough now, sir, but I knows what yer is in spite o' yer present git-up," and with a farewell wave of his hand Sunset Sam turned his horse back toward the camps, leading the one he had loaned to the paymaster.

He had gone but a few paces when he called out:

"I say, pards, do all yer kin ter keep ther life in thet leetle pard o' mine, Red Butterfly, for he do be in great danger."

"We'll do it, Sam," called back Buffalo Bill, and the scouts moved away on the trail to Fort Venture.

The next morning when he arose Sunset Sam learned from his men that Red Butterfly had come to Jumping Off City in the night, left a horse at the coach-stables as a relay and gone on the trail for Miner's Roost.

That day Sam pulled out on his drive, and Surgeon Powell was with him on the box.

CHAPTER XXX.

A MYSTERY OF THE TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL felt very much like laughing as he beheld Paymaster Birney's queer make-up in the light of the rising moon, for he remembered that officer as a handsome, dashing man of thirty, not as a dandy in his attire, and beheld now what appeared indeed to be an unkempt, grizzly-bearded tramp.

But he had saved his money at any rate, and that was something to be proud of.

As they went along the trail the paymaster said:

"How strange it is, Cody, that this part of the Pony Rider's trail, nearest the fort, should be the most dangerous."

"That is just what worries me, Paymaster Birney, for you know I have picked men in my League, and every one of us is at fault about the ambushers on this end of the trail."

"I believe you can never find their trails."

"If we do, sir, it is to lose them, for they disappear as though the one who made them was suddenly supplied with wings."

"The nature of the ground, as you see, is against making trails, for hard ground, bowlders, hills and canyons are everywhere; but for all that those fellows have a hiding-place we have never yet hit upon."

"And how many victims have they slain up to date?"

"Fifteen Pony Riders lie in graves along this trail, sir."

"It is terrible; but, in the face of this array of graves, that Indian youth will ride?"

"Yes, sir; he is a marvel."

"He was riding when I left the fort, and yet escaped?"

"He did, sir, in some mysterious way."

"Well, I hope he will continue to do so."

"He has gone through to-night, sir, and is hampered with his horses, for he leaves one each at the different relay stations."

"Has he passed yet?"

"I have not seen him, sir, and we may meet him."

"Who is he, Cody?"

"His name is Go-won-go, sir, and he was taken East by a miner whose life he saved, and was educated there."

"And his love of a wild life has brought him back to the frontier again?"

"He is back again, sir, and I suppose inherits from his people his love of a wild life and danger," was Buffalo Bill's cautious reply, though he could have said more had he cared to do so.

"And he helped you to wipe out the Red Buzzards?"

"No, sir; we helped him, for he was the one who found them, he and a man in Miner's Roost known as Parson Prim."

"I have heard of him, if he is the one who is called the Dead-Shot Parson."

"Yes, sir; the miners called him the Bible Sharp, Fighting Parson, Dead-Shot Parson, the Patrol, and by many other names; but he called himself Parson Paul Prim, I believe."

"Where is he now?"

"He disappeared most mysteriously, sir, after the Red Buzzards were cleared out."

"And he really aided you in your hunt for those robbers?"

"He did, sir, most signally, and he was the ally of the Red Butterfly."

"They worked together, and got the outlaws in a trap, and then Lieutenant Andrew Ames and the Scouts' League pounced upon them with the result you know."

"And Quantrel was really killed?"

"He attempted to escape, sir, by cutting a lot of horses loose, mounting one, and stampeding them down the canyon, and was joined by a number of his men."

"But the trail around the cliff was guarded by cavalry, and the stampeding horses, thus headed off, rushed madly over the cliff into the torrent below."

"Then that settled Quantrel."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, for in his own mind he was not now so sure that Quantrel was dead.

Red Butterfly was not one to follow a false trail, and he had said that the outlaw chief still lived, and that was why he, the Pony Rider, had come again to the frontier.

"And what about this trail, Cody?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Can its mystery not be solved?"

"Yes, sir, in time, I hope; but Red Rider is the one to do it, I think."

"You give him such credit, then, as a scout and trapper?"

"I do, sir, for I never saw his equal; but see, what is that yonder in the moonlight?"

All eyes were turned upon the object which had caught the eye of the chief of scouts.

The scouts halted and looked and wondered, for there, far ahead on the trail, was a snow-white form standing erect in the moonlight.

"It is standing at the grave of Pony Rider Pete," said Buffalo Bill.

"What is it?" asked the paymaster.

"Heaven knows, but I will find out. Come!" and with a bound the horses were urged into a charge down upon this mystery of the fatal trail.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MYSTERY STILL.

THE object that had caught the eye of Buffalo Bill far ahead on the fatal trail was what the superstitious-minded would have at once pronounced a ghost.

It was as snow-white as the regulation ghost, erect, its garments were long, fluffy and waving.

At least so it seemed at that distance.

Then too it was standing by the grave of a gallant young Pony Rider, whose life had been sacrificed by these secret ambushers.

Poor Pony Rider Pete's life had been full of promise, and though he had had a presentiment of his death, he still rode his beat fearlessly.

"I shall haunt the trail forevermore," he had said in the barracks one night, "if I am killed."

"Now mark my words, comrades."

And these words had been marked and remembered by many, when a week after Pony Rider Pete failed to come in, and search revealed the fact that he had been murdered.

There was a sergeant's daughter at the fort, a young girl of eighteen, to whom Pony Rider Pete was engaged, and she had begged to erect a monument over the dead Rider.

A soldier who had been a stonecutter at once volunteered his services, and he cut out on the face of a large stone, where the Pony Rider had fallen dead from his horse, a saddle, whip, spurs and pouch, grouped artistically together, and then had cut in the letters beneath:

"IN MEMORY OF
PONY RIDER PETE,
[PETER OLSEN.]

Ambushed at this spot, and killed, while in the discharge of his duty, June 5, 18—."

The commandant had allowed the stonecutter-soldier to camp there, under a guard, for a week, until he had finished his work, and the Pony Rider had been buried at the base of the rock, which stood as a massive monument to him.

Just three months after, another body was placed alongside that of the Pony Rider.

It was his sweetheart, never very strong, who had died of a broken heart, and whose last wish had been to be placed by the side of her lover.

So again the stone-cutter went to work, cutting in below the other lettering:

"VINNIE MAYO,
"THE PONY RIDER'S SWEETHEART."
"Parted in Life, in Death United."

It had been what the poor girl had said must be cut into the rock, and a large party went from the fort to see her laid to rest.

Such was the sad story of the graves on the plains, where the white-robed form had been seen by the scouts and the paymaster.

Was it any wonder that a feeling of superstition came over those who had been taught that way to believe?

Of course, whatever it was it could be captured there, and so Buffalo Bill called out:

"Widen out, boys, and surround it!"

The order was obeyed promptly, the scout and paymaster riding straight toward the rock, yet distant several hundred yards, and the men widening out into a crescent that would completely surround the weird object.

Suddenly there came a flash, a queerish blaze, very bright, and when its glare was gone the white form was not to be seen.

"On, men!" shouted Buffalo Bill, now aroused to greater exertion, and in several moments more he and the paymaster had dashed up to the spot and dismounted, while the scouts were entirely around the rock.

"Where is it?" cried Buffalo Bill.

"What was it?" the paymaster asked.

"Some trickery of those ambushing fiends," said the chief of scouts.

"Yes, of course; and we must solve it."

But this was easier said than done.

There was the huge boulder, with the moon shining brightly upon the inscriptions upon its face.

There were the two graves at its base.

But that was all.

The boulder towered aloft thirty feet above the heads of the scouts on horseback, its straight, shell-like sides forming no foothold even for a squirrel to climb.

Here, there, everywhere were other boulders, rolling land, canyons, hills and a rocky plain, a wild, barren land just then devoid of vegetation.

The chief of scouts looked at the paymaster, and the latter stood in silent meditation.

The men looked at each other, and some felt nervous of what they did not understand when they would have fought a tribe of Indians then and there fearlessly.

But one thought was in the minds of all:

"We all saw it, we all saw the flash and disappearance."

"How can he solve this mystery of the Fatal Trail?"

"Could one run from this rock to another, and not be seen, sir?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"A deer could hardly have run the distance in so short a time," was the answer.

"Did any one see a form running away?"

"No one did."

"Great Caesar's ghost! but I am floored!" admitted Buffalo Bill, frankly, and the paymaster wildly said:

"Ditto!"

Then a thorough search was begun, moving around the rock in circles that widened until the diameter was half a mile.

But nothing was seen to solve the mystery, and Buffalo Bill blew the bugle-call for his men to assemble, and the party continued on their way to the fort.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PAYMASTER'S STORY.

JUST before dawn the scout escort of Paymaster Birney rode into the fort.

They surrounded him so that those on duty whom he passed would not notice his make-up, and he hastened to dismount before his quarters and seek a refuge he was glad to find, for he did not wish the secret of his disguise to be discovered under any circumstances.

Worn out, after all he had passed through, he threw himself upon his bed and slept soundly for hours.

Then he awoke, and a bath, his razor and the fort barber to cut his hair, with his uniform, revealed Hugh Birney as a very striking-looking individual.

He ate breakfast alone, for no one yet knew of his coming, and a note to the colonel explained the situation and stated that he would report later.

At last he was in readiness to report to the commandant and so made his way to headquarters.

He was met by brother-officers, who greeted him with surprise at his coming, and pleasure that he had come, for he was a general favorite outside of the fact that he carried Uncle Sam's purse for his Boys in Blue at Fort Venture.

Colonel Seeley was with his adjutant, and gave the paymaster a warm greeting, introducing him to Captain Vernon Driscoll, with whom he was not acquainted.

The adjutant felt that he saw in the handsome paymaster a very formidable rival for the hand of Alice Seeley, but was determined to show no jealousy, as, being always drawn ahead in his accounts, Hugh Birney was the very man to be on good terms with.

Feeling that the paymaster wished to see Colonel Seeley alone, the adjutant took his leave, consoling himself in not hearing what Hugh Birney had to say by calling upon Miss Seeley, who was not so much pleased with Captain Vernon Driscoll as was that officer with her, though she had shown favoritism to no one, to her credit be it said.

"Well, Birney, you have had a time of it in getting here in safety?" said the colonel, when they were alone together.

"I have, sir; but I got here with every dollar of Government money I started with, though you knew of course, sir, of poor Veasey's death at the hands of road-agents?"

"Veasey, your clerk, dead?"

"I knew nothing of this," said the colonel in surprise.

"Did not the Pony Rider report it to you, sir?"

"By no means."

"He simply said that you had arrived in safety at Jumping Off City, and would await there for an escort."

"As Surgeon Powell was to go East I sent his escort of scouts with led horses, as I was not sure your clerk was along."

"Well, colonel, my poor friend Veasey was murdered before my eyes, and but for that gallant Indian Rider I would also have been shot down."

"You do not mean that Red Butterfly rescued you?"

"I do mean it, sir."

"Before he came here?"

"Yes, sir."

"What a boy he is; for he did not utter a word about this."

"But, tell me of it, Birney."

The paymaster did tell the story, from his hearing the wildest reports East of the doings of the road-agents and his alarm about getting through with the very large sums of money he had with him.

Then he continued:

"I recognized an officer in Council Bluffs, whom I had once met—Lieutenant Lemuel, of the Ninth Cavalry—"

"He was killed by Comanches in Texas six months ago."

"Killed, sir?"

"Yes."

"Why, I met him, as I said, and, recognizing him, spoke to him."

"Did he say he was Lemuel?"

"He did, sir, and seemed glad to see me, calling me by name."

"He was a fraud, for Lemuel was killed six months ago."

"Ah, now I begin to see how I was tricked."

"How is that?"

"Why, believing it to be Lemuel, I expressed my fears about getting through, and he told me of a clever ruse he had once played when carrying considerable money."

"This was to play poor, and he suggested a plan which I adopted, although I had to drop from my dignity as an officer."

"Your letter said that you were coming in disguise?"

"Yes, Colonel Seeley, we made up a disguise that was perfect, and put all our money in the inner lining of old miners' boots we secured, and in pockets in the backs of our shirts."

"Then we played dead broke miners, and we came through without suspicion."

"Our coach was held up by road-agents once in the daytime, and poor Veasey and myself were cursed as vagabonds who had nothing."

"We tramped from Dismal City to Miner's Roost, and there got forwarded by subscription to Jumping Off City as too poor for that camp, and all this time we had sixty odd thousand dollars with us."

"You did well, and I can excuse the loss of dignity in the good accomplished."

"But it was between Miner's Roost and Jumping Off City we were held up and Veasey was killed."

"Somehow the leader of the outlaws knew our secret, and we were dragged out in spite of Sunset Sam's telling that we were drunken vagabonds fired out of Miner's Roost."

Then, continuing, the paymaster told the whole story of Veasey's death, his rescue by the Indian Rider and what followed at Jumping Off City, the burial, subscription of the miners for himself, and the mystery of Pony Rider Pete's grave.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BEHIND TIME.

BUFFALO BILL had, earlier in the morning, made his report to Colonel Seeley of his trip to Jumping Off City.

He had said that on the way down all of his men had sought to find some clue to those who haunted the Fatal Trail but in vain.

Surgeon Powell leaving him at Jumping Off City to go on by coach Eastward he had also reported: but he had said nothing more about the paymaster than that he had found him awaiting him to escort him to the fort.

The white object seen at the graves of Pony Rider Pete and Vinnie Mayo he had reported as an unsolvable puzzle to him and to his men.

"And to me also, Cody, though of course it is some trick," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir, a trick I would give much to get at the bottom of."

"What will the Indian Rider think of it, I wonder?"

"I have a curiosity to know, sir."

"As I have."

But in vain did they try to arrive at a solution of the mystery, for they could not do so, and Colonel Seeley awaited the opinion of Paymaster Birney with some impatience, for he knew him to be a very level-headed fellow indeed.

The death of Todd Veasey was deeply regretted, and cast a gloom over his friends, for he had many at the fort, but the welcome of the paymaster showed him that he was not liked wholly for the money he brought with him.

He had gotten through in safety himself, brought his money, and all through the Indian Pony Rider, as he frankly admitted.

That there had been trouble of a serious nature, the death of Veasey was proof of; but the paymaster had very little to say upon the subject, and many felt that there was something back of his silence.

So the rumors went around the fort, and all waited patiently, or rather with impatience, for the day to come around when Red Butterfly must again appear at the fort, or meet the fate of the riders who had gone before him on the fatal trail.

The colonel was anxious beyond a doubt, and his beautiful daughter showed an anxiety that was surprising, regarding the fate of an Indian youth.

At last the day came, and Lieutenant Andrew Ames had asked if he should not ride over the trail to meet the Pony Rider.

The colonel's reply was:

"No; the brave fellow has taken the position, and he must take his chances."

The time was near at hand when the Pony Rider must be sighted from the lookout, and soldiers gathered in groups about to hear his call that he was coming.

The officers and their families also sat out in the open air where they could hear the sentinel at the tower when he sighted the Indian Rider.

The colonel was calm, yet anxious, and with him were his daughter, who nervously paced to and fro, and Paymaster Birney, whom the commandant had sent for to come to his quarters.

"Time's up, sir, and the Indian Rider is not in sight," said Captain Driscoll, the adjutant, coming into the room.

"I hope he may yet appear, for it's a rough ride, you know," the colonel said.

Thus the moments passed, and the soldiers showed their uneasiness.

The ladies were pale, the children hushed, while the officers looked at each other in a way that said:

"The Indian Rider has gone, too."

Over the fort a hush seemed to have fallen, and the call for parade broke so suddenly upon the silence as to startle all.

The companies marched to position, the parade was formed, the adjutant read the reports, and to the strains of lively music the officers marched up to salute the commandant, when suddenly rung out in the tower sentinel's stentorian tones: "Corporal of the guard! *The Pony Rider is coming!*"

In spite of discipline a wild cheer went up from the soldiers, the officers looked delighted and the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, the children shouted with glee.

All hurried to a position commanding the advance to the fort, and there, coming across the prairie at a run, was a horseman.

It was the Indian Pony Rider beyond a doubt, and he came on like the wind.

As he neared the fort the stockade gate was thrown open, and he dashed in amid a wild hurrah from the soldiers.

But while the cheer yet rung out, his horse staggered and went down heavily, while his active rider caught nimbly on his feet, seized his leather pouches from his saddle and started for headquarters.

Then all saw that the horse was dead, and from arrow-wounds from which his life-blood had been pouring as he ran.

He had done his duty well, dropping in his tracks when he had reached the goal, the arrows still sticking in him.

And the Indian Pony Rider?

All saw that he, too, was wounded, for in his left shoulder stuck an arrow, while the red current stained his buckskin shirt as it trickled down.

Walking up to where Colonel Seeley stood, he saluted, and then said in his cool way:

"It was Indians this time, colonel!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ONCE MORE.

"Indians on the war-path so near the fort, Go-won-go!" cried the colonel, with surprise, for the scouts had brought in no word that signs of red-skins had been seen.

"Yes, Colonel Seeley, I was ambushed by Indians, and finding others behind me I rode through them, but had to make a *detour* from the trail, which put me two hours behind, sir.

"I was pursued after striking the hills by mounted braves, and thought perhaps my horse, wounded as he was, would not make it here; but he did, the noble fellow."

"And you too are wounded, Red Rider, so go at once to the surgeon, and I will see you after awhile."

"My wound is slight, sir, though I could not pull the arrow out myself," and the Rider went over to the hospital, where the assistant surgeon at once took the arrow from the wound.

It had so entered the shoulder that Go-won-go could not get a grip on it to withdraw it.

He never flinched under the operation, and quietly said that he would dress his wound in his own Indian way, and thanking the surgeon, went to his quarters.

"Well, that red-skin has got the nerve of Satan," said the surgeon, and he added very frankly:

"Now he is going to doctor himself with herbs of some kind, and I will wager big money he will get well quicker than if I had care of him and treated him in a civilized manner."

The Red Butterfly at once went to work upon reaching his own quarters and with certain herbs known to his people did dress his wound, after which he ate his supper and laid down for a few hours' rest.

The mail and Express was to go back that night, so as to reach Jumping Off City by dawn, which was the usual run, and the idea of not going had never entered the mind of Red Butterfly.

It had however been thought of by Colonel Seeley, who had decided that the Red Rider was too badly hurt to go through, and he would send it under a guard of soldiers.

In the mean time he had ordered Buffalo Bill and his men at once on a scout, and sent Lieutenant Ames to support them with a company of cavalry, while a reserve force of two companies and a gun was to follow.

If the Indians were thus near the fort they must be in considerable numbers, the colonel thought, and he wished to be ready for them.

The scouts left the fort half an hour after Red Butterfly's coming, and the soldiers followed within an hour after.

The colonel had learned that Go-won-go had dressed his wound in his own way, then eaten a hearty supper and gone to bed, so decided not to disturb him, and send an officer with the Pony Rider's mail.

He had ordered a young lieutenant to be ready with twelve men to accompany him, and was expecting him to report for orders when in walked Go-won-go.

"What! you up again, Red Rider?"

"Yes, sir; I am ready to start, sir."

"Why, you are not going, Red Butterfly?"

"Why not, Colonel Seeley?" asked the youth, in surprise.

"I have ordered a guard to carry your mail through this time, as you are wounded."

"The wound is nothing, sir, and will be all right in a few days."

"I beg to report for the ride, Colonel Seeley."

"You are determined to go, then, wounded as you are?"

"Yes, sir, for I will not miss my run," was the determined response.

The colonel hesitated an instant, and then called out:

"Orderly, say to Lieutenant Barry that I will not need his services, and to dismiss his men."

Then, turning to the Red Butterfly, he continued:

"I sent Cody and his scouts to the place where you were ambushed by Indians, and Lieutenant Ames follows to support him."

"There is a reserve force following, so you will know what you may find on your way."

"Should you discover any signs of red-skins, you can readily reach one of the three forces for succor."

"Yes, sir."

"You have a good horse, I hope?"

"I have Black Diamond, sir, the best animal I own."

"He is a splendid beast, for I was looking at him but yesterday."

"Where did you find him?"

"I bought him, sir, from one of Quantrel's old men."

"Ah! and where is he?"

"In Irons at Dismal City, sir."

"I took him there."

"See here, Red Butterfly, you are too modest, I assure you, for you never speak of any of your own deeds."

"To find out from you what you have done is very hard work, for you never told me how you saved Paymaster Birney's life, and at the same time a very large sum of money belonging to the Government."

"There was nothing to tell, sir, for my coming frightened off the road-agents, as they supposed I was a company of cavalry, for I have a knack of imitating the notes of a bugle and the echoes made by my horse's hoofs sound like many."

"That is your way of putting it to shield yourself from any credit."

"No, Colonel Seeley, I do not seek credit, for I came here for a purpose which I hope to carry out and thus satisfy my own conscience."

"It is my pleasure, sir, to do my duty too, in all things and to please you."

"Well, I have no fear of your not doing so; but now tell me of this man you got the black horse from?"

"It was on my way out here, sir, that I met him, and because I was an Indian he thought I would be ready for any mean act."

"He had overheard the plan of Paymaster Birney to get to the fort, and made up his mind to rob him."

"He was penniless, horseless and had no weapons, so took me into his secret upon the principle that I was a villain."

"I pretended I was, learned his game, took his black horse out of pawn and we journeyed together to near Dismal City when he sought to kill and rob me, and do the other work alone; but I prevented the carrying out of his plans, and took him a prisoner to Dismal City."

"I am ready, sir, to start."

"Then go, my brave young friend, and Heaven preserve you."

Go-won-go saluted, and two minutes after was out of the stockade flying along the Fatal Trail once more.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NO TRACE.

BUFFALO BILL did not spare his men and horses on the ride to the scene of the ambush of Red Butterfly by the Indians.

He spread his scouts out in a long line, each within hail of the man on either side, and thus encompassed a distance of several miles.

The orders were to advance at a lope in as straight a direction as the nature of the country allowed, and to continue on until they reached the locality of the spot where the ambush had taken place.

In this way, were the red-skins or their scouts moving toward the fort, they would be discovered, and a hail or a shot would bring the men together, while a man could be sent back to hurry up Lieutenant Ames to the scene, who, in his turn, could dispatch a courier for the force then in his rear some miles.

But the scene was reached, and not a sign of an Indian had been discovered.

The scouts halted and awaited orders.

Soon they came, each man riding to the nearest one on his right and telling him to continue on around the place, so as to surround it.

Then he returned to his position, and thus the human circle was thrown around the spot where Red Butterfly had so nearly lost his life.

A scout was sent back to Lieutenant Ames to halt for the night where he was, that trails made might not be destroyed by others, and a courier went still to the rear to give the same instructions to those following as a reserve.

Thus the scouts waited until dawn, when they would go to trailing.

At the very first glimmer of day they were afoot and ready, and Buffalo Bill was on the scene which Red Butterfly had said was where he had been fired upon.

There was the track of the Indian Rider's horse, and it showed that he had suddenly wheeled about, then back again, and then dashed through the ambushers.

From there the trail was spotted here and there with drops of red, fallen from the wounded horse.

The trail also suddenly branched off toward the hills, and thither it was followed by Buffalo Bill and his scouts, the latter stretched out just within sight of each other so as to send back signals.

On to the hills the chief of scouts went, Jack Crawford by his side, and the red drops became more frequent.

After some miles they came to where the trail turned sharply around a spur and headed toward the fort.

"The horse was running hard all along here, Bill," said Jack Crawford.

"Yes, Jack, and bleeding as he was it is a wonder how he held on to the fort, for it is a long twelve miles from here."

"I guess the Indian knew the horse would die, so put him to it for all he could do."

"Yes, but Jack?"

"Yes, Bill."

"Can you show me a single trail other than that made by Red Rider's horse?"

"I have not seen any, Bill, now you come to speak of it; but I was trailing the Rider's horse all the way."

"And I was looking for another sign of trails."

"And saw none?"

"Not one."

"That is strange."

"Very."

"What do you make of it, Bill?"

"I do not know."

"What was the Pony Rider flying from?"

"Ghosts."

"Ghosts?"

"I guess so, as they left no trails."

"Then they were Indian ghosts on a war-trail from the happy hunting-grounds."

"Why do you say so, Jack?"

"Because they fired arrows into the Pony Rider and his horse."

"True; but we must find out how those red-skins have covered up their trails."

"If we can," was the reply of Jack Crawford.

The other scouts came up now, and the soldiers followed; but in vain was it that trails were sought for, as no trace could be found save of Red Rider's own horse.

Back to the fort then they went, after the whole day revealing nothing, and the scouts and officers in a quandary as to what else to do.

It was late when they arrived at the fort, and then learned that Red Butterfly had started upon his return ride, for they had seen nothing of him.

"Spread out as we were, Colonel Seeley, he never could have passed through our line," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, then he has been captured or killed," was the response of Colonel Seeley, and he was not alone in this opinion.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BOUND EASTWARD.

WHEN Surgeon Frank Powell reached Jumping Off City, after a talk with Sunset Sam, he concluded to leave his horse there and go on in the coach.

This he did, and the stage rolled out of the mining-camps with the two on the box.

There was a strong friendship existing between the surgeon and Sunset Sam, and had been ever since their first meeting.

In fact, Sam had been an ally of Frank Powell as well as of Red Butterfly, the Pony Rider; and more, the driver had done much to help along the cause against Quantrel and his men.

So they chatted pleasantly together as Sam sent his team along, for there were no passengers inside.

To the surgeon Sunset Sam told the story of the attack of the moonlighters upon the paymaster pointing out the spot where Veasey had been shot when they came to it.

"Can it be Quantrel again, Sam?"

"Lord, sir, it might be, for that fellow has nine lives like a cat, and unless you saw him dead, I'd hardly believe he had been killed."

"I thought I saw him die, Sam; but then it was night, and he might not have gone over the cliff."

"It would have killed him had he gone over, Sam?"

"Yes, beyond all doubt."

"Then I guess he didn't go over."

"Where did he go, then?"

"I wasn't there to see."

"I was, and I would have taken oath he went to his death with the others; but the Rider does not think so."

"Red Lightning?"

"Ah! you have christened him by a new name."

"Yas, Pard Doctor, he are Red Lightnin' and no mistake."

"That young feller beats my time."

"He's a wonder, Sam; but tell me of these moonlighters."

"I only see one."

"That was the chief?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the others?"

"They war thar."

"How many?"

"That I doesn't know, Pard Doctor; but I tuk ther idee ther feller was a-bluffin', and I were a-fixin' ter lay him out, thinkin' he were alone, as I nuther seen or heerd any others."

"But when I braced him on it and told him hands up, he laughed at me."

"You were too risky, Sam, for his men might have shot you."

"So they might, doctor; but they didn't, and I covered him with my leetle pepper-box, and thought I had him."

"And he?"

"Oh! it tickled him, and no wonder, for he had his men all in ther bushes."

"So I says to him ter show his hand ef he bed more men then he was himself."

"And did he?"

"No, doctor, he didn't show 'em."

"What did he do?"

"He jist called Jack!"

"Well?"

"Oh, Jack was thar, for he answered same as it was roll-call."

"Yes."

"Then he sings out Jill."

"And he was there?"

"He were over on t'other side of the road, but know'd his name and answered when he heerd it."

"You did take big chances, Sam."

"Waal, there was Jingo Jim, and Jim Jones, and they answered, so I threw up the deal and told him I were not tryin' ther bluff game on him no more."

"And then?"

"Waal, it were ther death o' thet poor feller, Veasey, and then come the sound o' hoofs."

"I declar' I fust thought that a comp'ny o' cavalry were a-comin', fer I heerd ther bugle, and ther hoofs sounded like a good many horses, owin' to ther echoin' in ther canyon."

"But all it were come inter sight as thet Injun Pony Rider."

"But he were enough."

"The moonlighters had fled?"

"Lord bless you, Pard Doctor, they got up and dusted, and ther way that chief swore were beautiful ter listen to, considerin' it were from disapp'intment," and Sunset Sam laughed heartily at the remembrance."

"From their name you may only expect to see those fellows on moonlight nights, Sunset Sam?"

"Yas, doctor, and I hopes not then."

"Doubtless; but if it is Quantrel up to his old tricks, and the killing of Veasey indicates that it was, you may look for considerable trouble, Sam, on the trail."

"That's my opinion; but it strikes me, as ther Injun Rider is back here ag'in, and you is on yer way eastward, Pard Doc, thet them moonlighters hed better hev a eye to the'r own safety."

"Well, Sam, I am going just far enough east to be of service to Go-won-go, and it may be that we can find out something about this band of moonlighters, too."

"As before, I wish you, on each trip, going and coming, to draw rein at the place where we used to deposit our letters, and see if there is anything there, and by so doing you can help us."

"I'm with yer, Pard Doctor, and it are my opinion thet both you and ther Injun means biz this time, as yer did before."

"But, remember, I am going east, Sam."

"I understands that, sir; but here we come inter Miner's Roost now," and the coach drew up soon after before the door of Jerry Thomas's Overland Lodge Hotel, where a good dinner was awaiting."

With fresh horses and several passengers Sunset Sam then pulled out for Dismal City, and from there Surgeon Powell took the next coach to go still further east."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DEAD SHOT PARSON.

THE coming back upon the Overland of Red Butterfly, created considerable excitement all along the trail, for his deeds were known from the railroad station, then far eastward, along all the ranches where the coaches ran.

Especially were the dwellers along the run he made interested, and to a wonderful degree.

All Dismal City was stirred up, Miner's Roost was excited and anxious, and Jumping Off City shared in the excitement.

The Indian Rider had passed unscathed along the trails and the miners were proud of him.

They had much rather it had been a pale-

face, but then his pluck was admired and appreciated, Indian though he was.

Whether he had been the direct cause or not of the overthrow of the Red Buzzards he got the credit of being, and soon regretted that he had hied him to other scenes as soon as the outlaw band was done for.

There were many miners in the various camps who wished to see lawlessness put down and they felt keenly their own inability to clean out the rougher element in their midst.

The truth was that very element was in the majority and good men had to stand a great deal.

The coming back of the Indian Pony Rider amazed many.

Why had he come if some deep motive was not behind his riding, as all had seen was the case before.

They had not heard of his coming again until they had seen him flit through the camps like a bird.

Then came the news of the holding up of Sunset Sam's coach by the moonlighters, and the killing of one of the supposed vagabonds who had been sent out of Miner's Roost.

This act of the moonlighters and the return of the Indian Rider was a coincidence.

It seemed strange at least, and knowing ones said that Red Butterfly was back again on the trail to go man-hunting.

They knew that his trail beyond Jumping Off City had become more deadly than ever and they wondered if he would escape as before.

Then there was another cause for excitement in Miner's Roost, in the return of Parson Prim.

That eccentric personage had turned up in Miner's Roost one day and had not been long in making a name for himself.

He had made the miners tremble more from dread of instant punishment at his hands, than from threats of future punishment in Hades.

There were many who were content to take their chances as to eternal punishment, yet shunned the parson as one to leave severely alone if they meant trouble or mischief.

The parson had secured a cabin on the spur of a hill overhanging Miner's Roost.

It was a cabin which, from certain red associations in the past, no one else would live in, and it had kept up its reputation after the parson located there, for the Mad Miner, taken there to be cared for, had been kidnapped by Quantrel in the absence of Parson Prim, while the nurse left in charge had been murdered.

The record of the cabin did not seem to trouble Parson Prim in the least, for he was one of those men who would not be trifled with, and if forced to kill a man would bury the remains with due dignity and consideration.

A steep hill led up to the parson's cabin, and, once there, he looked down upon all of Miner's Roost, commanded a splendid view of the valley and mountains, and could find a way out back along the ridge, the way which the kidnappers had come and taken the Mad Miner.

It was a comfortable cabin of two rooms, both large, and had a log stable in the rear.

The parson had disappeared most mysteriously after the capture of the Quantrel band.

No one knew whence he had gone, or aught about him.

His cabin did not appear to have been left with a view of not coming back, and this caused many to believe that the good man had been foully dealt with.

What then was the amazement and delight of the Miner's Roost denizens to see the parson calmly ride up to the door of the Overland Lodge one morning and dismount.

There was no mistake—it was Parson Prim.

He was well-mounted, for the Dead-Shot Parson loved fine horses, and he wore the same suit, it seemed, that he had gone away in.

A man of superb physique, he was dressed in black, the coat buttoned up close, the pants stuck in top-boots, and a wide brimmed slouch hat.

His face was clean-shaven, and his hair was white and worn long, though it did not seem that age had whitened his locks, but that they were prematurely gray.

A large pair of gold spectacles shaded his eyes, and were tinted as though to protect them from the glare.

Not a weapon was visible about him, and yet all in Miner's Roost knew that he was "well heeled," for he had readily found arms when occasion demanded it.

And so it was that Parson Prim returned to Miner's Roost.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

STILL ON THE WING.

JERRY THOMAS, the landlord of the Overland Lodge, was very fond of the parson.

He insisted upon his stopping in his hotel free of charge, Jerry frankly admitting that it might help him hereafter; but the Dead-Shot Parson preferred his home on the hill.

After he had been greeted with yells of delight, and much hand-shaking, the crowd awaited for the parson to give an explanation of why he had gone and where.

But never a word uttered the good man upon this subject.

He simply said:

"Any one living in my cabin, Brother Jerry?"

"No, indeed, and no one wants to."

"I do."

"Surely you are not going back up there?"

"Oh, yes, I like its solitude!"

In vain did Jerry urge; the parson was firm, and he went up to put the place in order.

After awhile he came down and told Jerry he would take his meals at the Lodge, as he would have a good deal of riding about to do, for he expected to do good work in Dismal and Jumping Off City as well as in Miner's Roost.

"They needs it, for they is a honerary set ther last one of 'em in them two places," said a miner standing near.

"Waal, parson, you are welcome to all the grub you can eat at my ranch, and I am only sorry you won't have a room here, too."

"No, I'll take my meals with you, and pay for them, too, for I ask no favors, Brother Jerry."

This fell like a thunderclap upon all who heard it, for the idea of a parson paying for his grub fairly startled the miners.

"But yer hain't told us whar yer been, parson?" said a miner.

"I do not see that I should do so, brother," was the reply, and it showed that the parson did not intend to be questioned.

In spite of his having decided to eat at the Overland Lodge, the parson went to the store and laid in a goodly style of provisions.

There were crackers, bacon, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper, a frying-pan, coffee-pot and a few other things.

Then the parson took up to his cabin and laid to one side with a small canvas to make a shelter to sleep under in bad weather.

Toward sunset the Dead Shot Parson went down to the saloon, and again got a welcoming shout from those who had been working all day and had not seen him, though his coming had flown like wildfire through the camps.

With a few exceptions all were glad to see the parson back in his old haunts, and those few were the worst spirits of the place who had reason to know that he would not tolerate any of their desperate work when he was around.

At last the parson got a chance to speak to Jerry Thomas alone, and he asked:

"Do you know anything about these moonlighters, Brother Jerry?"

"Not a word more than I heard from Sunset Sam, and that they robbed a miner living three miles from here."

"Have you reason to believe they are some of Quantrel's band who escaped?"

"Maybe, parson."

"You did not see any strange and suspicious characters in the camps after the Red Buzzards were wiped out, did you?"

"Not one, and I tell you it made some men in this camp lie mighty low, for they thought the soldiers were going to come here, too."

"Well, I am back again to hunt up sinners, and, Brother Jerry, I wish your aid, for you can help me."

"This is a sinful world, and it is hard to separate the chaff from the wheat, but there is plenty chaff right here in Miner's Roost, and I wish to see if we cannot sift it."

"I'll do all I can, parson, and if there was a hanging picnic here, and a dozn or so men I could name danced at the rope's end, Miner's Roost would be the better for it."

"That is so, Brother Jerry, and all I wish to do is to find those very men and convert them from their evil ways."

"But now tell me what you think of the Indian Rider coming back?"

"He's got more pluck than brains."

"You think he will be killed?"

"It's a dead-sure thing that he will."

"Well, he's a brave boy, and as he has had the pluck to ride this fatal trail, we must do all in our power to protect him."

"Oh yes; here we can keep those off him who hate an Indian, and hate him more because they cannot scare him; but it's on the t ail that he will catch his death-wound and never have the satisfaction of knowing who killed him."

"It may be so, Brother Jerry, but I pray not most sincerely. Ah! there comes the Red Rider now, is it not?" and as the parson spoke, Red Butterfly dashed into view, coming like the wind.

"It is for sure, and on time."

"Ho there, with the Red Butterfly's horse!" shouted Jerry.

And out from behind the hotel came a man at a run, leading the roan racer of the Indian Rider.

Springing from his horse as he came up, Red Rider raised his hat to the cheers given him by the crowd, handed Jerry Thomas a package for himself, and bounding upon his fresh horse was off like an arrow, again cheered by the miners gathered there to witness his swift coming and going.

A few minutes more and he was lost to sight in the gathering twilight as he raced down the steep trail into the valley.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE AMBUSHERS' THREAT.

THE people at Fort Venture were under a constant strain of anxiety.

The many deaths on the Fatal Trail, with now another Pony Rider making the run, kept them on the *qui vive* all the time, expecting that Red Butterfly would be slain.

The Pony Express was the only way in which the mail, official papers, and valuable packages could reach the fort, so that the importance of the ride may be well known, to those shut up there on the frontier far from home, kindred and friends, and in daily danger themselves.

The fact that the Pony Rider had come in on a dying horse, and himself wounded, had created a profounder feeling, while the utter inability of Buffalo Bill and his best scouts to find any trails of his ambushers added to the mystery and anxiety.

Could it be possible that a force of foes was within fifteen miles of the fort and yet not a trace of them could be found?

Then too the scouts had spoken of what they called their "ghost hunt." Paymaster Birney had told his story and so it went the rounds until the superstitious ones were in a fever of suspense and worry over all that had taken place.

All began now to look for the coming of the Indian Rider again.

Since his return the Pony Express matter had been reserved for him at Dismal City and not sent through to Jumping Off City by Sunset Sam's coach, to be taken by whoever the commandant of Fort Venture cared to send after it, one man or a score.

Upon the morning of the day when Red Butterfly was expected to come in, just before dawn, Buffalo Bill and four scouts had secretly left the fort and gone to the scene of the Pony Rider's last adventure.

The chief of scouts had suggested it to the colonel, and asked if he could not go.

"It will be well for us to be in hiding upon the trail, sir, so as to be ready for anything that may turn up."

So the colonel had bade him go, and he took with him men with national reputations as frontiersmen, Jack Crawford, Texas Jack and Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell.

If there were any ambushers about, this quintette of border heroes would surely find them, thought Colonel Seeley, and he said so to his adjutant, and to his daughter afterward.

Alice Seeley had been particularly anxious to see them go, for she seemed more nervous about the Indian Rider than any one else in the fort.

The five scouts departed at an hour that would enable them to reach the scene by dawn at furthest.

But when the dawn came the guard on his rounds beheld something sticking up upon the stockade gate.

The corporal stepped up, glanced at it and sent for the sergeant of the guard.

That individual came, read it, started to tear it down, but was urged not to do so by the corporal, and so the officer of the day was sent for.

It was Lieutenant Andrew Ames, and one glance he gave at the paper, and he would not touch it, but said:

"Sergeant, present my compliments to Adjutant Driscoll and ask him to please come here immediately."

The adjutant came, and he and the lieutenant held a short conversation together.

Then the adjutant said:

"I am glad the paper was not removed, Ames, for it is best for the colonel to see it as it is."

"I will go and fetch him."

So the adjutant went after the colonel, who was just rising, and asked:

"Well, adjutant, anything gone wrong?"

"There is a placard on the gate, sir, I wish you to see."

"I'll be with you in a few minutes."

It does not take a soldier in the field long to dress, and the colonel and the adjutant were soon at the stockade gate, where Lieutenant Ames awaited, with the sergeant and corporal, whom he had ordered to be there to give their report.

The colonel stepped close and saw a sheet of paper about a foot square, surrounded by a black border an inch wide.

On the paper in the four corners were respectively a human skull, crossed bones, a grave and a bowie-knife crossed by a revolver.

These were all done very artistically in black ink, while in the center in red ink was the following:

"WARNING!"

"If Colonel Seeley has any regard for his beautiful daughter, he will not again send as Pony Rider the Indian known as Red Butterfly."

"The Secret Assassins of the trail have their rights, and it is to rob the Pony Riders, and they will not allow one to make the run whom they are powerless to capture or kill."

"Buffalo Bill, for reasons before stated, is safe; but if he rides again Miss Seeley shall be the victim of our revenge."

"If the Indian Rider again takes the trail, Miss Seeley shall be the victim of our revenge."

"Send whoever else you please, and it's our game."

"BE WARNED! TAKE HEED!"

Such was the placard, and as Colonel Seeley read it he forgot his dignity and uttered an oath.

"Oh, papa!"

The colonel started, for there behind him stood Alice Seeley, who had followed him out of the stockade.

CHAPTER XL.

A SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER.

As the colonel beheld his daughter he attempted to tear down the placard, but her hand quickly grasped his arm.

"Don't destroy it, papa, for I have read it."

"You must pardon me, but I saw you come here, and, thinking you were going for a tramp before breakfast, hastened to overtake you."

The young officers looked nonplused, for, so intently had they been reading over the placard and watching Colonel Seeley, they had neither heard nor seen the approach of the young lady.

"Well, Alice, as you have seen this cowardly threat, there is no use mincing matters, so I will confess that it is not the first threat of the kind they have made."

"But you surely will not let that threat deter you, father, from duty, for it is your duty to send the Pony Express through."

"Well said, my brave girl."

"No; the Indian Rider goes on his rides, if he will stick to it, and if he falls, then Buffalo Bill goes."

"I will leave this placard where it is, Lieutenant Ames, for now that the secret threat is known to my daughter, I hold no interest in it, at least, until I catch the cowards who made it," he said, with a sudden menace in voice and look.

Then the colonel and Alice walked leisurely back to their home, when the latter said:

"One question, papa, and we will drop this honor which those ambushers have bestowed upon me, of their intention to make me the victim of their threat?"

"Well, my child?"

"You say this is not the first threat?"

The colonel arose, and taking a key from his pocket, unlocked a closet.

From this he took out the cross with its threat cut into the wood.

"This was the other one."

"Where did you get this one, papa?" said Alice, with interest rather than fear.

The colonel explained where Buffalo Bill had found it.

"Father, I note that the same hand did this knife-carving that wrote the placard, for there is a marked similarity in them."

"You have good eyes, Alice."

"See if I am not right, sir; and more, it is very skillfully done, both the lettering and drawing."

"The one who did it was an artist."

"You seem to admire the work more than you fear the threat, my child."

"I do, for I do not fear the threat."

"I am glad of that."

"If I could be used as a decoy to capture the ambushers, I will lend myself to the work most cheerfully."

"Well said, my child; but I shall take very good care that you shall not run that pretty head of yours into danger."

"Thank you, papa, I have no desire to die, I assure you, and shall be on the watch myself; but I wish some one else could ride Pony Express than Go-won-go."

"You have a dread, then, of the threat—"

"No, no, not that, father, only I fear for Go-won-go."

"To prove this, as they will not harm that splendid fellow, Buffalo Bill, yet make the same threat against my life, if he goes, I would be perfectly willing to have him ride."

"No, no, sir, it is for Go-won-go I was thinking, not myself."

"You feel a strong interest in this Indian youth, Alice?"

"I do, father, for I knew his sister so well."

"You know she was my rival for first honors at school, and yet my best friend."

"Had she not left V—I would have taken second place I am sure."

"And where is she now?"

"I do not know, sir, and Go-won-go would not speak of her."

"That is strange; but now let us talk no more upon this subject of the ambushers' threat."

"As you please, papa, for it holds less interest for me than you may think."

"Go-won-go is due at two o'clock?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if he will come in?"

"Judging from what the ambushers say of him I rather think he will, for they have given up all hope of killing him, it seems."

"How is it that he escapes where others fall?"

"I do not know his secret, but he certainly does escape them; but so does Buffalo Bill."

"It is different there, for they admit that they have some reason for not killing Cody, while they are doing all they can to bring Red Butterfly down," and Alice arose from the breakfast-table to look after household duties.

But when the hour for the coming of the

Pony Rider drew near, she went to the piazza of their quarters, which commanded a view of the Fatal Trail, which Red Butterfly rode, for miles, and found there her father, Adjutant Driscoll and Paymaster Birney, all watching far down the prairie slope for the coming of the Indian youth.

And everywhere else in the fort was the same interest shown, for all were on the watch, and suspense filled every heart as the question went around:

"Will he come in this time?"

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT RED BUTTERFLY SAW.

THE Indian Rider had secured his mail at Dismal City and was off like a shot, passing Sunset Sam on his way in, with Surgeon Powell on the box with him and several passengers inside the coach.

A shout from Sam, a wave of the hat from Surgeon Powell, a yell from the miners in the coach and the Indian Rider had gone by like, as the driver put it:

"A flash of red lightning, which he be."

A wave of the hand was Red Butterfly's greeting as he flew by the coach, and went on his way at the same break-neck speed natural to him.

He was splendidly mounted, for the youth knew a good horse at sight, and it was said at the mines that he had the best and speediest animals on the frontier.

So on he flew, halting at the mountain relay stations for fresh horses, again at Miner's Roost, where he delivered a package to a miner, then on to Jumping Off City, where there was another change of horses.

Here he was handed a letter from Landlord Leary addressed to himself.

He broke it open as he was eating his breakfast, and read as follows:

"RED BUTTERFLY:—

"If you do not quit riding Pony Express on this trail your days are numbered."

"We can kill you, and we give you warning that you shall die within the month if you make another run."

"THE ASSASSINS OF THE TRAIL."

The Pony Rider laughed.

"I wonder if they think these pen warnings are any worse than their revolver ones?"

Then he asked Landlord Leary how he got the letter.

"It was on my desk this morning, and addressed to yer; but who put it there I do not know."

"I saw a man place it there, Red Butterfly, and would know him again if I saw him; but I thought nothing of it at the time," said Velvet Bill, who was having his breakfast at the same time with the landlord.

"Well, Velvet Bill, if you see him again please spot him for me and find out where he hails from and who he is, and you will confer a favor."

"Anything wrong, Butterfly?"

"Oh, no, but wrong threatened."

"I'll spot him then for you."

"Thank you, but don't let him know you have your eye on him."

"Trust me for that, and more, Red Butterfly, know that Velvet Bill is your friend to call on when needed."

The dark eyes turned full upon the face of the handsome gambler, and Go-won-go replied:

"I have had half an idea that that was so, Velvet Bill, and I will do as you ask if I have need."

"Now I must be off, for time is up."

With a wave of the hand he left the room, sprung upon his waiting horse and was away, followed by a wild cheer of admiration from the loungers hanging on about The Mine.

"Ther jug went once too often to ther well, pards, and got broke, as I has read in Scriptur, somewhar between Genesis and Exodus, and thet red boy are goin' ter be thet jug some day, mark my words," said a miner.

He was not contradicted either in his assertion regarding where he found the *simile* he used, or what he prophesied about the Red Rider.

And on, unmindful of threats, danger and prophecies flew the Pony Rider, his superb horse seeming to like the run as much as did his master.

After a ride of a few miles he began to reach the barren lands, when suddenly he halted on the trail under the branch of a large tree.

Standing up in his saddle he reached up and took from the top of the limb, where it was fastened with a pin, a slip of paper.

This he opened and glanced at.

There was no writing upon it, simply the imprint of a human hand, done in red.

Just off the end of each one of the fingers there was a small pencil-drawing of a grave; but at the end of the thumb there was none.

The Pony Rider seemed to read the sign without words, and folding it up, placed it again upon the limb of the tree, where no eye could see it, so cleverly was it concealed beneath a leaf.

Then he wheeled almost abruptly from the

trail and went on at the same rapid pace as before.

On he flew for many miles, his horse not seeming to feel the fast pace, until he came to a bit of bottom-land, which he crossed, and, springing from his saddle, began to ascend on foot, giving his faithful animal that much of a rest without his weight, and in a walk.

He had just sprung into his saddle again to dash along the ridge, when his position gave him a view of the slope beyond.

What he saw caused him to quickly draw his revolver and come to a sudden halt.

Down the slope, seated behind a rock, over which he was peering, was a man in buckskin.

He was watching the country beyond, and lying flat upon the ground behind him was his horse, evidently hopped to keep him from rising.

But that was not all that the Pony Rider saw, for creeping upon him were two red-skins, their bows in hand, their arrows fixed, and they had halted to fire when the Indian Rider beheld them, and muttered:

"It is Jack Crawford."

CHAPTER XLII.

A LONG SHOT.

THE Pony Rider made up his mind with the quickness of a flash what to do.

There was Jack Crawford, on the watch for something, and in his rear were creeping two foes.

They were not sixty yards from him, and their arrows were ready to be sent into his back, and he would never know what killed him, for an Indian is a dead shot when he shoots at a foe.

And from the Indian Rider the two red-skins were treble the distance they were from the scout.

He could shout and alarm the scout, but yet he might not save him, perhaps, so he determined to fire.

It was but an instant in which he was making up his mind, and he knew that it was a terribly long shot even for his long-range revolver.

But he leveled and pulled trigger.

"That kills him," cried the Indian Rider, as he saw one of the red-skins sink forward upon his face, and the other, with a wild cry of alarm, let fly the arrow in his bow at random.

The scout also sprung to his feet, his rifle ready, and his keen, brave eyes took in the situation, while his weapon rose quickly to his shoulder, and the other red-skin dropped as he fitted another arrow to his bow.

As Jack Crawford saw the two Indians disposed of, he looked about for the one who had fired the shot that had saved his life.

There, flying along the ridge at full speed, was the Indian Pony Rider, and he waved his hand to the scout, who shouted back:

"God bless you, Red Butterfly!"

"Keep your eye open for the same traps."

Another wave of the hand, and the Indian Rider had passed on into the timber further along the ridge and disappeared from the sight of the scout.

"Well, now to see if those Indians are dead, or only shamming to get their work in on me."

"I think they are dead, for Red Butterfly never misses, though he shot at a mighty long range."

"My game I am sure is bagged, for I used my rifle at short range; but then no one ever knows about an Indian, so I'll go slow."

With this the scout advanced, his rifle ready as a hunter holds a gun when he expects to flush a partridge.

But the Indians never moved, and when the scout reached them he muttered, grimly:

"Yes, they are good Indians, now."

He examined them critically, musing aloud, while he kept his eye open for a surprise.

"Red Butterfly sent his bullet into that fellow's brain, and mine got it in the heart."

"Now, here is a pretty state of affairs, for, while I am watching from ambush to protect the Indian Rider, he suddenly bobs up serenely and saves my life."

"Then on he goes for the fort with a rush."

"Now, I had not the remotest idea of ever seeing the Pony Rider this far off his trail, and so told Buffalo Bill when he said I should come here."

"But Bill was right, for it seems the Indian Rider does not always follow the same trail."

"That accounts in a manner, I guess, for his escaping the ambushers as he does; but nobody else ever thought of this, and he has never given the secret away."

"Yet, he did not escape last time, surely, when they made a pincushion of his horse and himself."

"Well, as the Pony Rider has gone by, I guess I had better look Buffalo Bill up and report the situation."

He took up the two bodies and bore them to a pile of rocks, where he hid them away.

Then mounting his horse, he set off at a gallop in an oblique direction from that taken by the Indian Rider.

A ride of a mile and a half brought him in view of the post where the next scout was in hiding.

It was Night Hawk Powell, and Jack Crawford explained the situation, when his brother scout at once started to inform the next man, who was a couple of miles distant from his post of ambush.

Jack Crawford meanwhile returned to the place where he had left the dead Indians.

"They are Cheyennes," he said, recognizing their tribe from their make-up.

"This shows that Indians were on the trail, and it would never have been found out but for the Pony Rider."

"There were those at the fort trying to say the Indian Rider was in league with the ambushers, and it would be found out some day."

"But if it was ever so believed, this goes to show how the youth was wronged."

"They would have killed me, no trail could be found, and so it would have gone on but for that game Indian Rider."

"I see now how it is these fellows hide their trails," and Jack Crawford gazed intently at the feet of the two Indians.

They wore moccasins, yes, but that was not all, for fastened under the moccasins were thin boards, cut out like shingles, some two feet in length and a foot wide.

These were covered over with buckskin, and padded, so that when placed upon the ground no imprint whatever would be made.

By slipping his foot out of the heavy moccasin attached to the wood, the Indian still had a pair of light ones on, and could run rapidly when there was need for it.

"Well, that is the best contrivance I ever saw."

"Now to see what Buffalo Bill and the other boys think."

"At any rate, through the kindness of Red Butterfly, I am alive to make the discovery."

"I am glad I told Night Hawk not to tell that I had seen the Rider."

After a wait of some minutes longer, Jack Crawford saw Buffalo Bill and the other scouts coming, for the chief had called in all of his men.

They rode up at a canter and gazed first at Jack Crawford, and then at the bodies of the two Indians which he had stretched out for their inspection.

"Ah, Cheyennes! been gunning, I see, Jack," said Buffalo Bill, as he rode up and dismounted.

"There's the game, Bill, as you see," was Jack Crawford's quiet response, as all the scouts gathered around the dead braves.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN INTERVIEW WANTED.

ON went Red Butterfly at the same swift pace, after having sent a shot in to save Jack Crawford from death.

He followed the ridge for a couple of miles, then down into a valley, across a range of barren hills, and struck the Bad Lands near the graves of Pony Rider Pete and his sweetheart, Vinnie Mayo.

He flew by with but a glance at them, whatever the sight of them may have brought up in painful memories, and continued on the regular Pony Trail now to the fort.

At length he came around the spur of a hill which brought him into view of Fort Venture, still miles away, and his run was now over prairie land.

His splendid horse seemed to enjoy the change, and kept up his rapid pace without urging.

In sight was rest, water and food, the intelligent animal well knew, and, besides, he seemed to instinctively know that he had brought his rider through in safety.

Nearer and nearer drew the Indian Rider to the fort, and at last he came within hearing of the cheers of the soldiers.

On he dashed, the stockade gate was thrown wide open, he passed in like a flash, and a minute after had dismounted and stood before Colonel Seeley, his leather pouches in his hand.

"Once again you have made it, Go-won-go," said the colonel, while he grasped the youth's hand.

"Yes, sir."

"You were not ambushed this time?"

"No, sir."

"Nor held up by road-agents?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see Buffalo Bill?"

"I did not, sir."

"Strange, for he went out on the trail at dawn this morning."

"Was he alone, sir?"

"No, he had four scouts with him, and hoped to make some discovery regarding the secret ambushers."

"I saw Jack Crawford, sir, and he maybe has made some discovery about them."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, sir, for I did not speak to him, only saw him at a distance."

"I see; but you have done well, Go-won-go, and I hope it may so continue."

"Now go and get your dinner, and then before you take rest my daughter wishes to see you."

"Wishes to see me, sir?" asked the Indian Rider, in some surprise.

"Yes, she has something to tell you, which I expected to speak to you about, but she asked me to allow her to do so."

"You will find her in the parlor after you have freshened up and had your dinner."

The Indian youth gazed fixedly into the face of Colonel Seeley.

It was a look which seemed almost to read his thoughts, and then, with a salute he turned away and went to his quarters.

He changed his buckskin suit, as he was wont to do on each ride, freshened himself up with a bath and then had his dinner.

He was wont then, when arriving on time, to take several hours' sleep before starting on his return ride, which was made at night back upon the trail, but now he concluded to go and see Alice Seeley and learn just why she wanted to talk with him.

On his former rides, when at the fort before, he was wont to pass his off-days there, for he had but one ride a week, giving him four days when he was not on duty.

But now he had taken a fancy to make Dismal City his resting place for some reason, and to the regret of those at the fort, who had been glad to have him there.

So his only time to see Alice Seeley was then, at his sleeping hour, but for this he did not care, as he said:

"I can make up all the sleep I lose, when I am at the other end of the trail."

"But what does she wish to see me about, I wonder?"

Red Butterfly had not told Colonel Seeley, as the reader has seen, anything about his long shot, which saved the life of Jack Crawford.

It was a way he had of never speaking of himself or his deeds.

He had fired the shot, recognized the scout, and then gone on his way.

If Jack Crawford chose to tell about it, well and good, he might do so.

And he had hinted to the colonel that the scout might have made some discovery.

What that discovery amounted to he could guess would be that the two Indians were Cheyennes, and cleverly hid their trails by the contrivance which the scout had found upon their feet.

"They will make no other discovery."

"They will find that the ambushers are Indians, and Cheyennes, and that is about all, for even Buffalo Bill and his splendid trailers cannot track the Assassins of the Fatal Trail."

"It will be a blow at the ambushers to find that two of their number are gone, and I suppose they will lay it to me."

"So be it; I do not care what they do."

"But ride this trail I will until there is no need for me to ride it any more."

"Then let some one else take the chances."

So mused the Indian Rider as he was preparing for his visit to Alice Seeley.

Having finished his dinner, he left his quarters, carefully locking the door behind him and putting the key in his pocket.

Then he made his way to the private quarters of Colonel Seeley, and as he neared the door Alice Seeley came out upon the rustic piazza to meet him and ushered him into the parlor of the really comfortable cabin.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE INTERVIEW.

"YOUR father said that you wished to see me, Miss Seeley," was the way in which the Indian Rider met the beautiful girl.

"Yes, I am most anxious to do so, Go-won-go, and yet, let me, before I tell you why, congratulate you upon your continued escape in riding Pony Express; but can it last much longer, this escaping death?"

"I think it will, Miss Seeley."

"Now sit down there and listen to what I have to say."

The Indian Rider obeyed the command, for so it appeared to be, though not intended as such.

"Now I am going to tell you what you may have heard."

"I have heard nothing since my coming in, Miss Seeley, for I have kept close to my quarters."

"I know that I am taking the time from your sleep, Go-won-go."

"Do not think of that, for I have ample chances for rest."

"Then you have not heard of a cross which Buffalo Bill found on your trail?"

"A cross?"

"Yes; one painted black and with some lettering cut into it."

"I never heard of it, Miss Seeley."

"I will show it to you, then."

She arose, and, drawing aside a curtain, revealed the cross behind it.

The Indian Rider fairly leaped toward it, and, kneeling quickly, read what was cut into the wood.

"This is infamous," he said almost savagely.

"This was brought home by Mr. Cody, when he was riding Pony Express, and my father kept it secret from me until to-day."

"You should not have known it at all."

"Oh, yes, it so happened that I found it out."

but the day this cross was brought here came your letter saying that you were coming to ride Pony Express again."

"And with my riding the Secret Assassins have found no fault, I am glad to know."

"You are mistaken."

"Ah! have they made another threat?"

"Go to the outside of the stockade gate and read what was put there last night."

"Then return here, please, Go-won-go."

The Indian obeyed promptly.

He read the placarded threat without a change of countenance, then re-read it, as though to fix it in his memory, and in ten minutes was back in the parlor.

"You saw it?"

"Yes, Miss Seeley, and it is an outrage, cowardly, to threaten you because they cannot kill me."

"Will you still ride Pony Express after this double warning that I shall be the victim, Go-won-go?"

The question was asked in a peculiar way, and the Indian was startled out of his perfect calm by it.

He was silent an instant, in deep meditation, and then said firmly:

"I shall still ride Pony Express, Miss Seeley, notwithstanding that warning against my doing so."

"Then you have no fear that those Assassins will carry out their threat?"

"Oh, yes, they will visit some revenge upon you, if they can."

"Then fear for my safety does not deter you?"

The Indian was again silent for full a minute. But his face was unreadable now.

At last Alice Seeley repeated her question, and then he answered:

"No, Miss Seeley, fear for your safety does not deter me, and I wish you to see it as I do."

"If you are threatened with an unknown danger from an unknown foe, I am constantly in danger of death from an unseen enemy."

"You are a dweller here in the fort, with your father the commandant and scores of gallant officers, and hundreds of brave soldiers at his command to protect you."

"I go alone upon the trail which has been fatal to so many."

"Now if I do not fear the trail for myself, I do not fear the threat against you."

"It is a bluff, so to speak, of the Secret Assassins, for some purpose of their own."

"Kidnap you if they could, yes they might, and hold you for ransom as a protection for themselves; but kill you they neither could nor would, even if they got an Indian to do the work, for one of my race, you know, Miss Seeley, will kill a woman or a child as they would a man pitted against them," and the Red Rider uttered the last words in a tone of bitterness, as though he felt keenly the truth of his words.

Then he added, as though to excuse his race:

"It is our training, you know, to kill."

"We are fed on it from infancy, reared to kill, and a scalp is a scalp, come from whose head it may, and as we grow older we are sent forth to fight and to slay our foes, the pale-faces."

"Is it a wonder, with such teachers, and our inherited taste for blood from our ancestors, that we Indians are merciless toward human life, when, with all your Christian charity, your commandment 'Thou shalt not kill,' your teachings of forbearance and forgiveness, you pale-faces go to war with each other, slaying, pillaging and burning?"

Alice Seeley stood amazed before the young Indian who so pointedly questioned her, and so truthfully defended his people.

But ere she could reply, he changed his manner, and said, in a low, firm tone:

"I shall ride the Fatal Trail, Miss Seeley."

"It was for your own sake, not mine, Go-won-go, that I wished you would not."

"For myself I have no fear, but for you—"

and in a whisper she continued:

"I know your secret, Go-won-go."

"And will keep it?" he said, quickly.

"Yes."

"I thank you—good-by," and the Indian Rider glided from the room, and going to his quarters threw himself upon his cot.

Whether he slept or not, he was up in time to get his supper, saddle his horse, and report to Colonel Seeley his readiness to start upon the run to Dismal City.

"You saw my daughter, Go-won-go?"

"Yes, sir."

"Her danger does not deter you from going?"

"It does not, sir, for I hope to unearth any danger that may threaten Miss Seeley."

Five minutes after the rapid clatter of hoofs told that the Indian Rider had started once more upon his perilous run.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SCOUTS' RETURN.

AN hour after the departure of the Indian Rider, Buffalo Bill and his four companions rode into the fort.

While the chief and Jack Crawford made

their way to the quarters of Colonel Seeley, the others went to their camp, and were at once questioned by their comrades as to their discoveries.

"Wait and hear from Bill," was their reply, and then the question was asked:

"Did the Indian Rider come in?"

"Yes."

"On time?"

"You bet, just at two o'clock."

"And he has gone?"

"He has."

"When?"

"On time to the minute."

The three scouts looked at each other, but said nothing, and the others knew that some discovery had been made in which the Pony Rider was interested.

In the mean while Buffalo Bill and Jack Crawford had gone to the quarters of Colonel Seeley, and found that gentleman in dressing-gown and slippers, listening to his daughter read aloud.

When announced by the colonel's orderly, they were admitted at once, and Alice made no sign to depart, not intending to do so unless her father requested it, which he did not.

To her delight he said:

"Glad to see you back, Cody, and I will hear your report, so do not mind my daughter's presence."

"May I ask, sir, if the Indian Pony Rider came in?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"He did."

"But behind time, sir, so long that you were doubtless most anxious about him?"

"He was on time to the very second, Mr. Cody, for I had my watch in hand when he arrived," said Alice.

Buffalo Bill looked as though he had little confidence in a lady's watch ever being within an hour of the correct time, and glanced at Jack Crawford, who seemed to feel the same way.

Colonel Seeley recognized their doubting looks, and said:

"Yes, Cody, Red Butterfly was on time to the minute."

"And he has gone, sir?"

"Yes."

"And he started on time to the minute, for again I timed him, Mr. Cody, though I know you, like all your sex, have no confidence that a lady's watch can keep time."

"I do not blame the watch, Miss Seeley," was the scout's smiling response.

"I thought not; but is it not strange, papa, that Mr. Cody did not meet Red Butterfly?"

"It seems so; but what trail did you come, Cody?"

"The Fatal Trail, sir."

"He has been gone nearly two hours now."

"It is strange we did not meet him."

"Ah! can aught have happened to him so soon?"

"No, Colonel Seeley, I have no fear of that Indian coming to harm."

"He is all right, and, no matter what turns up, he'll be back on time."

"You speak confidently, Cody."

"I am led to do so, sir, from what that young Indian escapes; but he told you about meeting us?"

"He said that he had not seen you."

"Not seen us?"

"Not seen you he said."

"Ah! but he saw Jack Crawford he told you, sir?"

"Yes, he said he saw Jack Crawford at a distance, but not to speak to him."

At this both the scouts laughed, and Cody said quickly:

"Pardon me, Colonel Seeley, but I do not believe that Red Rider told you that he had saved Jack Crawford's life?"

"Not a word did he say about it."

"Well, sir, that is what made us laugh, for he comes here and does not say a word about what happened on his ride in."

"He remarked, I recall now, that Jack Crawford might bring news, or some words to that effect."

"Well, sir, I would like Jack to tell his story."

"Certainly, Crawford," and both the colonel and Alice looked mystified.

"Although, sir, most important to me there is little to tell," said Jack Crawford.

"Mr. Cody put me on a stand where I had an idea I might as well go to sleep as to look for any foe; but fortunately I did not follow out that plan."

"I took position among some rocks where I could command a view up and down the valley, and making my horse lie down hopped him."

"That there was danger behind me I never suspected, as it was open, barren land for some hundreds of yards to a ridge."

"Suddenly I heard a distant shot behind me, and springing to my feet beheld an Indian on his face, and another about to send an arrow at me."

"I sent a bullet into the red-skin, and as he fell saw who it was that had fired the shot that had saved my life, for those two red-skins were

creeping upon me and within sixty yards when one was killed by the desperately long shot of the Indian Rider."

"Bravo! he fired the shot that saved you, then," cried the colonel.

"Yes, sir, for he killed one of the Indians, hitting him in the head even at that long range, and put me on my guard against the other, thus enabling me to take care of him."

"I called to the Indian Rider but he was flying away and answered by a wave of his hand."

"Then I went after Mr. Cody, and he called in his men."

"And then, Cody?"

"The Indians were Cheyennes, sir, and I have here the style of shoe they wore to keep from making a track."

"We buried them, sir, among the rocks, and brought with us their weapons; but in vain did we search for their trail and for other Indians, and so returned to the fort."

"And not a word of what he had done did the Red Butterfly tell me," said the colonel, while Alice remarked:

"Like Mr. Cody, papa, I begin to feel that Go-won-go is invulnerable."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE STATION-MASTER'S MISTAKE.

WHEN Red Butterfly reached Dismal City on his last run, after having delivered up his mail to the superintendent, the latter said to him:

"I have bad news for you, Red Butterfly."

"Well, sir."

"Your man has escaped?"

"You mean the prisoner, Faro Frank?"

"Yes."

"How did he get away, sir?"

"I was taken in by a red-headed fellow who came in on the coach and pretended to be an inspector."

"I trusted him, of course, and so decided to send the prisoner under his charge back to Council Bluffs, if he would take him."

"He said he would be glad to do so, and that a hanging here might help the whole line."

"So I had him put in the coach, heavily ironed, and the pretended inspector got in, too."

"Well, the old hearse was held up in Death Canyon by the moonlighters, and the two men were taken out, but the driver swears it was a put up job, and that red head was in league with the outlaws."

"At any rate, the two left the coach with the outlaws, and, what was more, a very snug little sum of gold-dust was taken, too."

"By the moonlighters, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was the driver?"

"Barney."

"Is he in now?"

"Come in just before you did."

"Will you please send for him, sir?"

The superintendent did so, and in a short while a heavily-set man appeared, bronzed and fearless-faced.

"Barney, Red Butterfly here wishes to ask you some questions about your red-headed passenger and his prisoner."

"Fire away, Red Rider."

"You were halted by the moonlighters?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the Death Canyon."

"It was moonlight?"

"Moon just rising about three o'clock in the mornin'."

"How many moonlighters did you see?"

"I seen but one."

"You are sure there were others?"

"Sart'in."

"How do you know?"

"Waal, ther chief called to Jingo Jim to shoot the top of my head off if I cussed him ag'in."

"And Jingo Jim?"

"Answered that he would do so with delight."

"And you?"

"Swore off from swearin' right thar, young Injun."

"Did the chief speak to any other of his men?"

"Yas, he called to one named Jill ter shoot my horses if they didn't stop bein' so restive—yer see I was a-makin' 'em so."

"And Jill answered?"

"He did, from right near the leaders, though I didn't see him."

"Did the moonlighter chief know of the passengers?"

"He did, for he told them to git out and come with him."

"And they obeyed?"

"Sure."

"Without the slightest remonstrance?"

"Eb?"

"Without remonstrance?"

"Come ag'in on thet word, Injun Pard, for yer lays over me in book 'I arnin'."

"I mean did they resist, or ask to be let off?"

"Nary resist and nary askin' ter be let off."

"I see; but now tell me if the moonlighter seemed surprised to see the prisoner in irons?"

"He didn't."

"Asked him no questions?"

"Not a question."

"Nor you?"
 "Nothin'."
 "And did he know of the gold-dust you had along?"
 "He did."
 "And where to find it?"
 "He did."
 "So took it?"
 "You bet."
 "Did he say he was a Moonlighter?"
 "He said his name was Captain Moonlight."
 "He wore a mask?"
 "Yes, a silver one it looked like."
 "Was dressed in black?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "And was mounted on a black horse?"
 "You has got him down fine."
 "Tell me the spot in the Death Canyon where you were held up, please, Mr. Barney?"
 "Right at the twin cliffs."
 "There has been no rain since?"
 "None."
 "When was this?"
 "Last night, for yer knows I makes a short run, startin' out at sunset goin' east, and leavin' at Range Station at noon coming west."
 "I am very much obliged, Mr. Barney."
 "You is not only welcome, pard, but yer is ther politest Injun I ever seen, and a gent, though I never thought I'd call a red-skin that," and with this back-handed compliment Barney took his departure.
 "I watched your questioning closely, Red Rider, but could not see what you were driving at," said the boss, or as, when putting on airs, he liked to be called the superintendent.
 "May I ask you, sir, how long that pretended inspector was here?"
 "Some days."
 "Did he keep about the station all the time?"
 "No, for I loaned him my horse and rifle and he went hunting."
 "When?"
 "The day before he left."
 "And you told him all about the prisoner?"
 "Yes, I am sorry to say that I did; but, as I told you, I thought he was an inspector."
 "You had only his word for it, sir?"
 "Oh, no, he wore the badge."
 "Then I do not blame you, sir."
 "But did you tell him also about the money?"
 "Certainly."
 "He knew the amount and where it was hidden in the coach?"
 "He did."
 "I am sorry to say then that from all I glean the man was an outlaw and spy, and rescued the prisoner, as well as got the money."
 "The deuce!" cried the boss in alarm.
 "See if I am not right," was Red Butterfly's rejoinder, and the boss already began to feel that he was.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE MERCILESS MOONLIGHTER.

THE next morning Red Butterfly was up early, and mounting one of the stable-horses, to spare his own, he rode off on the trail toward Range Station.

The boss saw him go, as did Barney, and wondered what he was up to.

Reaching Death's Canyon he rode into it as though it held no terrors for him.

He had not the slightest trouble finding the scene of the hold up of Barney's coach by the moonlighters, and hitching his horse he set to work like one who had a duty to perform.

He saw just where the coach had halted, for there were the tracks of the restive team where they had stood for some time.

Then he found the tracks of the horse ridden by the moonlighter chief.

This trail he followed on foot for a hundred yards or more, and found where it joined the tracks of two other horses, but these had been left standing there.

Getting close down to his work, the Red Rider discovered the shoe tracks of the pretended inspector and the dragging steps of the prisoner, and both left off where the two horses had been in waiting.

Then the three trails of the horses went on down through the valley leading to the right.

The Red Rider next returned to the scene of the rescue and robbery.

He spent more than an hour looking about in the bushes, and then muttered to himself:

"I am beginning to believe that my first thought was right about Captain Moonlight."

"Now to see just which way he went from here."

He mounted his horse, now and rode on to where the trail of the three animals was visible.

This he followed somewhat cautiously, and did not halt until he seemed to have decided fully upon the course it led further on.

He halted for rest and dinner then, and afterward turned toward the station, a satisfied smile upon his face.

It was dark when he reached Dismal City, and Barney was just pulling out for his drive in the night to East Range.

"Found anything, pard?" he asked.

"Nothing but trails, but you will not be held up to-night I feel sure."

"Good," and Barney drove on his way rejoicing, for somehow he put perfect confidence in the words of the young Indian.

When he saw the boss he found with him Sunset Sam, who had just come in.

Sam was excitedly telling something to the boss, who was also considerably moved.

"Ah, Red Butterfly, I am glad you have come, for Sunset Sam was held up on his run in at dawn this morning," said the boss.

"Jist afore dawn, jist at moonrise, red pard, and afore I reached Rapid Run."

"They took my two leaders away from me, the best pair of horses on the trails, and more, they killed a passenger and got plenty of dust from him."

"It's awful!" and Sunset Sam was more flurried than it was his custom to get under any circumstances.

"Who did it, Sam?" coolly asked Red Butterfly.

"Ther moonlighters, of course, red pard."

"Where?"

"At Rapid Run."

"How many had you along?"

"One passenger, a miner from Jumping Off City who has been saving his diggings, and was that glad to be goin' home he were a-laughin' all ther time, for he rid on ther box with me."

"And he had his gold along?"

"He had sent a heap home to his folks, and had what he had dug o' late, some five thousand dollars, he told me."

"Where was it?"

"He had it in a bag, which he carried open-like, same as it was his clothes."

"The moonlighters held you up just as the moon was rising?"

"Sure."

"How many did you see?"

"Only that consarned Captain Moonlight; but he were more than enough."

"And he killed the miner?"

"Waal, I begin to sass him, and he rode right up to ther fore-wheel on my side, and said:

"See here, Sunset Sam, I'll give yer a hint ter close that ugly mouth yer has."

"This gent hev got money along, and I wants it."

"And then?"

"Why, he leveled his revolver right across me and pulled trigger."

"Neither of us was a-lookin' fer that, though ther miner did look sorrowful at fearin' he were to lose his gold."

"And he killed the poor fellow, Sam?"

"Lordy, yes; the bullet entered his heart, and he would have fell off the box ef I hadn't caught him."

"And then?"

"Ther consarned cuss then told me ter hand down ther gent's leather bag."

"Which you did?"

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Not I."

"Did he not threaten you?"

"Oh, Lordy, yas, Injun Pard! but I told him thet my biz was ter drive ther old hearse, not ter rob it, and ef he wanted ther bag he hed ter git up an' take it, fer I'd die afore I'd help him ter steal."

"And he took it?"

"He laughed at me and tuk ther bag, arter calling ter his men ter fill me full o' lead ef I draw'd on him."

"And then?"

"I come on here, and ther boss is goin' ter bury ther miner in proper style and write his folks."

The Pony Rider said no more then, but that night he had another long talk with Sunset Sam, and the next morning the two rode off on horse-back together, for the west-bound coach did not start out for a couple of days after its arrival.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

RED RIDER TRAILING.

SUNSET SAM was no trailer.

He was a driver pure and simple, and as good a one as ever held reins.

When deprived of his leaders, he had hard work getting on to Dismal City with only his wheelers.

Fortunately, he had only the body of the miner to carry, little freight, and walked up the steep hills himself to ease his horses all he could.

But he was several hours late in arriving in Dismal City, and the boss and a party of volunteers were just going out to look him up when he came in sight.

That night, in having his second talk with Red Butterfly, Sunset Sam could not understand why the Pony Rider wished him to go to the scene of the robbery with him the next morning.

But he had confidence unbounded in the young Indian, and felt that he had some reason which he did not yet care for him to know.

"I'll go with yer, Red Rider, though drivin', not ridin' is my strong point."

"But why does yer wish ter go?"

"Only to see the place, Sam, for I have a curiosity to see all places where a tragedy has occurred."

"I'll go."

"Thank you."

So the next morning the two mounted stage horses and rode away.

It was a ride of twenty odd miles to the spot, and not far from the first relay station out of Dismal City on the trail to Miner's Roost.

Rapid Run was a swiftly-flowing stream which the trail crossed, the coach having of course to ford it.

It ran down a narrow valley filled with large rocks and timber, and was a very wild-looking place.

"It's just the place for a murder," said Sunset Sam, as the two reached the dismal spot.

"Yes, but you have never been held up here before, Sam?"

"Never, and I has wondered at it too, pard."

"Now where were you when halted?"

"Right thar, and ther moon were jist peepin' above yonder mountain."

"I see."

"And it 'pears ter me thet them moonlighters can't do no deviltry 'cept on moonlight nights."

"They are moonlighters, you know, Sam."

"Yas, that's so."

"And their chief has the name of Captain Moonlight."

"Sure, and I'm glad we has no more moonlight nights fer some time."

"But my idee is that ther moonlighters will halt me any night, or day, when there is anything ter git by it."

"No, Sam, I do not agree with you, for you have only been halted at night, and by moonlight, and so was Barney."

"It's a fad of those fellows, and I guess they'll stick to it, so if you carry any valuable freight in future my advice to you is to carry it by day, and until we have moonlight nights again."

"Then look out."

"I'll do it, pard; but now yer is here, what is yer goin' ter do about it?"

"You go over yonder and cook dinner and I'll have a look around."

"The moonlighter was there when he halted you?"

"Yas, pard."

"And he rode just here when he shot the miner?"

"That's it."

"Well, I know all now, so will look around while you stake our horses out and broil those antelope steaks."

"I'll do it," and Sunset Sam walked away, leaving Red Rider standing in the trail.

He examined the tracks of the horse carefully, marking his way from where the chief had stood when halting the coach, and up to where he had ridden when he shot the miner.

Then he muttered:

"The tracks are the same."

"He was riding the same horse he did when he halted Barney," and he took a piece of paper from his pocket upon which were drawn in pencil four tracks of a shod hoof.

Then he searched all about the spot most carefully, going to the distance of a hundred yards.

Next he returned to the spot where the coach had been halted and followed the tracks of the two animals taken from the team to where they had been halted in the timber.

Taking the trail of the chief's horse he followed it to the same spot.

Then the three trails united and went off down the valley.

Returning to where Sunset Sam was he found dinner ready and ate with a relish.

"Yer seem ter be in good eatin' trim, Pard Butterfly."

"I am."

"I guesses yer has struck a lead."

"I have seen something to please me, Sam, and we'll return to Dismal by a roundabout trail, if you don't mind."

"I'm with yer, pard," was the ready response.

Soon after they mounted their horses and rode away, and Red Butterfly was in the lead.

The trail they took was that of the horse of the moonlighter chief and the two leaders taken from Sam's team.

For miles they followed it, and noting its direction, Red Rider again branched off and made for Dismal City which, to the surprise of Sunset Sam, he struck just where he said he would come out into the trail.

When the next mail-coach came in from the East, Red Rider was again in the saddle for his run to the fort, and Sunset Sam followed in due time.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A LETTER AND A RESPONSE.

SUNSET SAM left Dismal City with an easy feeling about the trail, for after what Red Rider had told him he seemed to have no dread of the moonlighters until moonlight nights came again.

"I wish ther moon would let up for a month or two," he said as he drove by the place where he had been last halted at Rapid Run.

Arriving at Miner's Roost without adventure he had at once asked for Parson Prim.

"He's up at this cabin," said Jerry Thomas, and as the Overland Lodge was where Sunset

Sam always got a square meal, he concluded to go up to see the parson if it did delay him a few minutes.

But just then he saw the parson coming down to the Lodge and went forward to meet him.

"Well, Brother Sam, I hope you are well and manage to clear steer of road-agents nowadays," said the parson in his deliberate way of talking.

"Waal, I are well, Pard Parson, but I doesn't steer clear o' road agents, as ther moonlighters has made it more than lively fer my old hearse o' late."

"I am sorry to hear this, Brother Sam."

"Waal, I'll tell yer about it some time, Pard Parson; but jist now I wishes ter give yer this letter which was handed ter me fer you by ther Red Rider."

"Ah! I hope the young Indian is well."

"Oh, yes, and tough as a pine knot."

"But thet letter needs an answer, so ef yer'll scan yer eyes over it while I are a-eatin' my supper and answer it, I'll be thankful, fer I is ter leave your letter ter him at Jumping Off City, don't yer see?"

"Yes, I understand, Brother Sam," was the reply and while Sam went into the saloon for an "appetizer" before supper Parson Prim read his letter.

Then going to Landlord Jerry's private office, or what was honored by that name, he hastily wrote a few lines in response.

Sunset Sam came out from his supper in excellent humor, and did not seem to dread in the least the long night drive he had to reach Jumping Off City.

The worst part of the road, as far as the driving went, he would get over before dark, for they had an early supper at Overland Lodge, and beyond that he had little to fear except the road-agents, and these he had made up his mind would not bother him again on that trip.

The parson came out and slipped the letter into his hand, and said:

"Leave that for him in safe keeping, Brother Sam, for it is somewhat important."

"I'll do it, pard; but I must get off, for I'm a quarter hour late in leavin'."

So Sam mounted his box, called to his team, and went away from the Lodge at a rapid pace, which he slackened as soon as he got out of the camps.

He got over the worst part of the road by the time it was dark, reached his relay-stations in safety, and wheeled into Jumping Off City in time for breakfast at The Mine.

"I say, Velvet Bill, you is a squar' sort o' fellow, and I wants yer ter do me a favor," he said, as he saw Velvet Bill seated before the hotel smoking a very handsome meerschaum pipe, the bowl being a *fac-simile* of a human skull.

"All right, Sam; I'll do anything I can for you," was the ready reply.

"It's just this, Velvet Bill."

"I wants yer ter hev a eye on thet young Injun Pony Rider."

"He is man enough to take care of himself, Sam," said the gambler, with a laugh.

"Yas, but he's a-goin' ag'in' big odds, and you knows every rascal in this camp, and ef yer sees any on 'em a-leavin' town afore ther time fer ther Rider ter come along, jist spot 'em, for they means ter kill him ef they kin."

"Atween here and Dismal City I doesn't fear but thet he kin take keer of hisself, but it's atween here and ther fort I looks fer 'em ter corral him, and my idee be thet them as lays on ther trail fer him goes out o' Jumping Off City."

"It may be so, Sam; I had not thought of that; but I wish to see the Red Rider when he comes along, and now you have suggested what you have to me I'll keep my eyes open and chip in if I see anything going wrong against him."

"I know'd yer would, Velvet Bill, and I thanks yer," and Sunset Sam went in to breakfast, not glad that he would have the day off, to rest, as he did not start off before night, Dismal City having been made his place for a longer stop-off.

As he expected to be asleep when the Indian Rider came through, he gave the parson's letter to the landlord, with the express instructions that Go-won-go was to get it.

Soon after the arrival of the coach, Red Butterfly dashed up and was handed the letter.

While waiting for a change of horses and breakfast he read it.

The letter was as follows:

"Such a man as you describe, with red hair and beard, came into Miner's Roost yesterday and bought a lot of provisions."

"He told me that he was a miner, living nearer Dismal City than here, but came here for provisions, as the trail was better."

"He was well-mounted and had a pack-horse, and though he started toward Dismal City, I followed his trail and found that he turned off to the right and bore away to the wild hills nearer Jumping Off City than Miner's Roost, and I at once suspected him of being a moonlighter, so shall keep a watch for him."

This letter was not signed; but when the Indian Rider had read it he said abruptly:

"That man was the same who played the inspector dodge upon the boss at Dismal City."

"If he can be tracked, the den of the moonlighters will be found, for the provisions were for them."

Having finished his breakfast the Red Rider again started upon his run for Dismal City.

CHAPTER L.

THE STRANGER.

THE rides of the Red Butterfly continued, and yet he did not fall a victim to the secret assassins, nor had the dire threat to visit vengeance upon Alice Seeley been carried out by them.

The Indian seemed indeed to bear a charmed life, and yet all dreaded to see him go upon the Fatal Trail and were glad to see him return in safety.

But still the prophecies were that some day he would meet the same fate that the other riders had.

The moonlight nights again came round, to the great regret of Sunset Sam who made no secret of the fact that he now expected trouble.

"Them moonlighters will be showin' the'r hands ag'in, see ef they don't," he said to the boss.

"I hope not on this trip, Sam, for I'd hate to see that old gentleman robbed, for I got a letter from the superintendent to show him every kindness, as he has come out with a view of putting considerable money in the mines, and making them as they ought to be," and the boss nodded to a man of fifty-five, a handsome, well-preserved gentleman of courtly manners and having the appearance of one who was the possessor of great wealth.

"I'll take all the keer I kin of him, boss; but whar is he goin'?"

"He is going first to the fort, and I sent word by Red Butterfly to have an escort to meet him at Jumping Off City, for he has authority to find out from Colonel Seeley just the situation here, and if the commandant don't think it safe yet awhile he'll not invest."

"If Colonel Seeley does think it's all right, then he'll stop at Jumping Off City to look about him, then Miner's Roost and next here."

"I guess he represents a number of capitalists, Sam."

"Waal, I'll do all I kin for him," and Sunset Sam was presented to the stranger who greeted him pleasantly and said that he would ride on the box with him, which the driver was glad to have him do.

Miner's Roost was reached all right for supper, and then Sam pulled out for Jumping Off City, the stranger on the box with him.

Sam was smoking one of the stranger's fragrant cigars, yet did not enjoy it as much as he might have done had not the moon just then been rising.

For the life of him he could not help telling the stranger the story of the moonlighters, and when he had finished his story he saw that his companion seemed deeply impressed.

"It is strange, my friend," he said, "that I came on this trip against my reason, urged to do so by several moneyed men who wished to go in with me in purchasing several mines which we learned were very valuable if properly handled."

"My wife urged me not to go also, but I came, and I cannot get rid of the feeling that I will lose my life here, so let me say to you now, if the road-agents attempt to stop us, drive through them, for I have with me a very large sum of money."

"Should I fall, my address is in my pocket, and you can send word to my wife."

"This may be all a silly idea, and it may be a foreboding of evil."

"What do you think, my friend?"

Sunset Sam was about to reply when stern and clear came the command:

"Halt! Hands up, Sunset Sam!"

"The moonlighters!" cried Sam.

"Drive through them, cost what it may," sternly ordered the stranger, and remembering what the boss at Dismal City had told him about the stranger's influence, Sam laid the lash upon his horses.

The team sprung forward just as the moonlighter chief came riding down into the trail, from the position where he had commanded a halt.

He was taken by surprise completely by the act of Sunset Sam, and instantly threw his pistol to a level and fired, just as the stranger did the same.

Both weapons flashed together, but when the moonlighter's horse went down, the stranger dropped back on the coach, saying faintly:

"He has given me my death-wound."

"Drive on!"

Sunset Sam obeyed, laying the lash on his horses' backs, for he expected other shots and quick pursuit.

But no other shots were fired, and yet there came the clatter of hoofs behind, and Sunset Sam urged his team on the faster, until loud and clear came a voice shouting:

"Ho, Sam, help is at hand!"

CHAPTER LI.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

"It's ther parson's voice!"

"Hurray!" yelled Sunset Sam, as he recognized the voice calling to him, and up dashed a

horseman, who was indeed no other than Parson Prim.

"Come, stranger, here be a parson, and he hain't no place of a doctor, too, so yer is all right now ef yer is hurted bad," said Sam, in an encouraging way.

"I have my death-wound, my friend."

"I feel it, I know it," was the reply.

"Well, Sam, what is the trouble?"

"Where are the road-agents?" called out Parson Prim, as he drew rein by the side of the coach.

"Back yonder, pard."

"They was ther moonlighters, and this gent asked me ter dash through 'em, and I done it; but he's got his death-wound, he says."

"Not so bad as that; but I will soon see to his wound."

"Not here, parson, fer them fellers will come on."

"Get the gentleman down from the box, Sam, while I take a run back and make sure the moonlighters will not crowd us."

"Don't do it alone, parson."

"Oh, I don't mind a few of them, Sam."

And the parson wheeled his horse and dashed back down the trail.

He came back in a few minutes and said:

"They have gone, Sam, and all I found was a dead horse."

"The gent killed him; he were ther chief's horse."

"Well, he had a saddle and bridle on when I first came by, and this time they were gone."

"Now, sir, let me see how badly you are wounded."

Sunset Sam meanwhile had gotten the stranger down from the box and placed the coach cushions under him.

Kneeling by his side, the parson quickly examined the wound and said:

"You have an ugly wound, sir, though I hope it is not fatal."

"It is but four miles back to Miner's Roost, and I have a comfortable cabin there and can care for you."

"If you think you can ride my horse, I will take you back, but if not, you will have to stand an all-night ride in the coach to Jumping Off City."

"I will try and stand the ride back, sir, to Miner's Roost," was the reply.

So the stranger was aided to mount, and, walking by the side of his horse, Parson Prim started back for Miner's Roost, while Sunset Sam drove on to Jumping Off City audibly cursing Captain Moonlight and all moonlighters.

It was a hard ride for the wounded man, and he suffered greatly; but at last the camps were reached, and, calling to Jerry Thomas to come and help him, the parson continued on up to his cabin, where he soon made the stranger as comfortable as it was possible for him to be.

He examined the wound as a skilled surgeon would have done, and after some difficulty extracted the bullet, for he had surgical instruments with him.

The stranger bore up wonderfully, and at last said:

"Now, tell me frankly, sir, is the wound fatal?"

"Not necessarily so, sir, though it is serious, and if inflammation sets in may prove fatal."

"I answer you as you wished me to do."

"That is right, sir."

"When does the coach go back eastward?"

"The Indian Pony Rider goes back sooner, sir."

"Then, will you write a letter to my wife for me telling her the exact truth?"

"I will, sir."

"And you will see that it goes by the first mail eastward?"

"I will, sir."

"And let me tell you to secure me a couple of nurses, and spare no expense, for I am a rich man."

"And more, sir: I have with me some important papers and a large sum in money, which please take in your keeping for me."

"I will, sir; but let me first write the letter, and then I will give you a powder that will cause you to sleep, for you must keep very, very quiet and disturb yourself about nothing whatever, for I have studied medicine and surgery, and will do all in my power for you."

"I know that you will, my friend."

The letter was written and addressed.

And the address was to carry it to that lovely home far away in New York, on the Hudson River, where one night the reader beheld a lovely woman awaiting the return of her maid with her dress that she might attend a ball.

And the reader will remember the visitor to that room, and how he robbed the beautiful woman of all her jewels and fled from her presence.

And now, on the wild frontier the husband of Lucita Dillingham was lying dangerously wounded by the hand of an outlaw, and with only strangers around him.

So to the Indian Rider the letter was intrusted by the parson, who said:

"Hurry it through, Red Butterfly, and if she be the right kind of a wife she will come to her

husband in his suffering and danger, unmindful of her own comfort at such a time."

"Yes, if she be a true woman she will come, had Red Butterfly responded, and away he went with the letter so full of sad tidings to the beautiful wife of the wounded man.

CHAPTER LII.

THE STRANGER'S WIFE.

MRS. DILLINGHAM still reigned as a belle, beautiful in face and form, lovely in character, nothing of the flirt, and yet numbering her admirers by scores.

Ever devoted to her husband's interest, fond of her home, yet ever restless in heart for the love she had lost.

If she had given up Daniel Darwin, had sacrificed herself at the bidding of her parents and brother, then she would at least be true to herself, and so she made a noble woman, a devoted wife.

The robbery of her jewels, and the money she had with her at the time was placed upon the butler as the guilty man.

She knew that her brother had said that the butler was in his pay, and hence he was guilty, if not the thief, and she could not tell who it was that had really committed the crime.

She had gone to the ball jewelless; had driven by the club, picked up her husband, and had not spoiled his evening by telling of the robbery.

Never had she appeared more lovely, and yet people wondered that she wore no jewelry.

Was it a new fashion, a new fad?

If so, they must follow it, for society follows its leader as blindly as sheep do.

When they had returned home, Mrs. Dillingham told the story of her lost jewels.

The butler was gone, and so, with a choking sensation at not telling the whole truth, she said that the butler was the criminal, yet he had a comrade who had been the actual robber.

"Little woman, you have a giant nerve to go to the ball after all you have passed through," said her husband, admiringly.

He often lost as much and more, or made a like amount on a single speculation, so the intrinsic value of the stolen property was little to him.

He dearly loved this beautiful young wife, and she had frankly told him that she loved another when he had asked her to marry him.

He had taken her upon those conditions, and had never regretted it, yet he well knew that she carried the secret love still, away down in her innermost heart.

"We can do nothing to-night, Lucita, but to-morrow I will put it in the hands of the police.

"Had you told me when we were down in the city, I could have done so then, and with a better show of catching the thieves."

It was just what Lucita did not want, the catching of the thieves, and so she had not told him when in the city.

Her heart felt a twinge when her husband added:

"But you do not know about such things, and how necessary time is to catch those rascals.

"But to-morrow will do, so now go to bed and do not think more of it."

But she did think more of it, and not until the sun peered in through the blinds did she close her eyes, for she sorrowed for the brother who had fallen so low, and this hurt her far more than the loss of her jewels.

When Mr. Dillingham went down-town, he put the whole affair in the hands of the police, and was told that all that could be done would be, but the chances were against the catching of the thieves, unless the antecedents of the butler could be traced.

This was impossible, for Mr. Dillingham had taken the butler upon his face, without a reference or knowing aught about him.

He had come to his home one Sunday and asked for work, and he told such a straightforward story of his having been in butler service in England, saved up his money and brought his family to America, and then been robbed by sharpers, and had to go to work, that, in need of a good man just then, he had been engaged and found to be thoroughly competent.

So Mr. Dillingham had blamed himself for the loss of the jewels, and going to Tiffany's, where all the sets had been purchased, he ordered them duplicated and sent at once to his home.

Such was the man who had been wounded by the shot from the revolver of the moonlighter chief.

And to his home went the letter from Parson Prim, telling of the affair, and it found her at home one Saturday afternoon.

She read it, called at once to Jule, her maid, and sent for the coachman.

"James, Mr. Dillingham has been seriously wounded, and lies in a mining-camp in the far West.

"Take this money and go at once to the city, carrying my trunk which Jule will have ready

for you by the time the wagon is ready, and buy three first-class tickets as far as the railroad goes.

"I wish Robert, the footman, to go with me, so tell him so, and Jule also accompanies me.

"We will come down by the six o'clock train, so have the tickets, the baggage checked, and meet us at the depot with a carriage.

"Do you understand fully, James?"

The coachman answered in the affirmative and departed, and three hours after, Mrs. Dillingham, her maid and Robert were on the way to the city, where the fast Night Mail was caught for Chicago.

With ample money at her command, Mrs. Dillingham allowed of no delays, except of half a day in Chicago, where she purchased all necessities that an invalid would need. At the terminus of the railroad she found that the coach had started that morning and she would have to await until the next day.

But again her purse came into requisition, and she chartered a coach to carry them on at once, and a liberal fee to the driver caused him to make such good time that she passed the regular coach within twenty-four hours and decided to continue on by private conveyance for the remainder of the journey.

So the Pony Riders carried the command on ahead as far as Dismal City, and from there she would have to take the regular coach she was told.

She had learned by questioning the Pony Riders that her husband yet lived, and just how he had been wounded, and she hoped for the best.

At last Dismal City was reached and Sunset Sam's coach had been held back for her coming for hours, as if she missed it she would have to wait for days as there were no relays of horses for the stage she came in, and the animals that drew it had done double duty on the last part of the trail.

Sam heard the orders from the boss, which had come west by Pony Riders, and gladly waited, and word had been sent on ahead by Red Butterfly to Miner's Roost to say that the wounded man's wife was coming and Sunset Sam's coach would be held at Dismal City for her.

The parson had told the good news to the wounded man, whom he had so devotedly nursed for many long days and nights, and had heard the low reply:

"God bless her! she will only come to see me die."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FAIR PASSENGER.

THE moonlighters had not appeared on the trails since the wounding of Mr. Dillingham, and it was hoped that they had been frightened off, for nothing could be heard of them, in spite of the beautiful moonlight nights which had followed that affair.

Colonel Seeley had, upon hearing of the wounding of his old friend, gone himself to Miner's Roost to see him, and had passed there a couple of days, while his large escort, of a dozen scouts and two companies of cavalry, had scoured the trails from Dismal City to Jumping Off City for some trace of the moonlighters.

But in vain, they were not to be found or heard of.

The colonel had taken one of the assistant surgeons from the fort with him, to see what could be done for the wounded man, and also had carried along all he could think of to make him comfortable.

But the assistant surgeon agreed with the parson, that the wound had been more severe than was at first supposed—and the chances against recovery were a hundred to one, though he might linger for weeks.

Duty demanding the presence of the colonel again at the fort, he had taken leave of his friend, promising, if possible, to come again, but fearing he would never see him more.

The coming of Colonel Seeley to the mining-camps had a salutary effect upon them, for the lawless element went into hiding, and expecting a return soon, laid low after his departure.

There was no killing while he was near, and not a rumor came of an act of lawlessness upon the trails.

The scouts and soldiers protected the trails from Dismal City to Jumping Off City, and yet nothing was found.

The Indian Rider flitted back and forth on his rides, and yet was not shot from his saddle by the Secret Ambushers, though they were known to still haunt the trail between Jumping Off City and the fort.

Then the colonel and his escort returned to the fort, and, some ten days after, the news was received from Red Butter, that word had come over the Overland to hold Sunset Sam's coach back for the wife of the wounded man, who was coming by private stage.

"She will only come to see me die," the wounded man had said, and Parson Prim knew that it was so.

He had done all in his power for the stranger, but knew that the wound would end fatally.

As the time drew near for the coming of the

chartered coach into Dismal City, Sunset Sam grew a trifle nervous.

Moonlight nights had come again, the soldiers and scouts had gone from the trail, and Sunset Sam began to feel it in his bones, as he expressed it, that the moonlighters had not been dead, but sleeping.

"They'll show tha'r mean selves ag'in, see ef they don't," he said to the boss.

At last the extra coach rolled into Dismal City, and Sunset Sam stepped forward with the boss and met the occupants.

Robert, the man, was on the box, and Mrs. Dillingham and her maid in the coach.

"I have held the regular coach for you, madam, and Sunset Sam will drive you through as quickly as possible," said the boss.

"I'll do it, ma'm, ef ther critturs is stove up on ther trip," said Sunset Sam, doffing his slouch hat and bowing low.

"You are most kind to me indeed, gentlemen, and I appreciate all you have done," was the reply.

"Ther Injun Pony Rider tuk ther news through, ma'm, thet yer was a-humpin' yerself ter git here, and thet I'd hold ther old huss fer yer, ef it tuk till mornin', so here I is, and ther team are ready fer ther trail soon as yer beautiful self and thet pretty gal with yer, not ter speak o' ther mankind o' ther outfit, hev hed supper."

Lucita Dillingham understood the sentiment, if not catching all the words uttered by Sunset Sam, and said they would go to supper at once and be ready in half an hour.

So they entered the apology for a hotel and were soon after ready to start.

"I believe, sir, you are the gentleman who was with my husband when he was wounded, so, if you do not mind, sir, I will ride on the box with you and have you tell me all about it."

"I'll be as tickled as though I'd run a nail in my foot, ma'm, ter hev yer; but it's a rough trail, and maybe we might be held up ag'in, so it's safer inside."

"I'll take my chances with you, sir," was the fearless response.

And so Sunset Sam aided his fair passenger to the box, Robert being put inside with Jule.

Then away rolled the coach over the moonlit trail, the wild scenery looking grand and weird to the fair traveler.

And as they went along Sunset Sam told the story of the wounding of Mr. Dillingham by Captain Moonlight, and all that had followed it.

Lucita loved to hear him talk, for his quaint expressions, strange dialect, and honest, fearless face held an attraction for her that gave her perfect confidence in him.

So she led him on to talk more, and she soon had the whole story of the Overland Trail from Dismal City to Fort Venture, with all its perils and lawlessness.

She heard too of Red Butterfly and his strange story.

She was told of how he had been taken East by Yankee Dan, the Red Miner, and how devoted had been the Indian Pony Rider to his adopted father, and how he had rescued him from the Red Buzzards.

"I tells yer ma'm, thet Red Rider do bear a charmed life, and, beggin' yer pardon, ma'm, he'd fight ther devil with spurs on— Whoa! I know'd it!"

And Sunset Sam drew his team to a halt on the very spot at Rapid Run where the moonlighters had before halted him for loud and ringing had come the command

"Halt! Hands up, Sunset Sam!"

CHAPTER LIV.

TWO SHOTS.

THERE was no mistaking the stern command, and without being told, Lucita Dillingham knew what it meant.

She was perfectly calm however and said:

"We too are halted!"

"Yas, ma'm, ther cusses w'd halt the'r own mother and rob her," and then, as though to make an appeal to the moonlighters, Sunset Sam called out:

"See here, Cap'n Moonlight."

"Ay, ay, Sunset Sam."

"Has yer got a leetle spark o' feelin' in yer coward heart thet deviltry hain't put out?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this, Pard Moonlight, thet this be a leddy on ther box with me."

"Ah! a lady, then I shall doubtless get a rich haul."

"Look hyur, Cap'n Moonlight, this leddy are ther wife of ther gent yer shot down so coward-like a month ago on ther trail beyond Miner's Roost."

"He are, as yer may know, 'cause yer keeps posted I sees, bein' as yer laid low when ther sojers was 'round; but ther gent are very low from ther wound you give him, and maybe will be called on ter hand in his checks, and you done it."

"Well?"

"It hain't well though, for this leddy are his wife, and she have come here by extra coach from ther terminus o' ther railroad, and are going ter him now, whar he are lyin' at Miner's Roost."

"She hev with her a young gal and a man as looks no account whatever, and thet are all, so ef yer is ther photograph even of a man, let her go through and no nonsense."

Sunset Sam had made a strong appeal, and though neither complimentary in his expressions to either the moonlighter or Robert, the footman, he had said what he wished to say.

Then came Captain Moonlight's answer:

"If she can afford to travel with a maid and man-servant, as your words imply, she must be rich, so I will demand my toll."

"I'll pay your demand, sir, only let me pass on without further delay," said Lucita.

"Look heur, Cap'n Moonlight, hedn't you ever a mother, or a sister thet yer can't appreciate a poor woman in ther fix yer places this one?"

"Oh, Lordy! ef yer robs this leddy this night o' Our Lord, I'll quit drivin' coach and go in with ther Injun Rider ter hunt yer ter ther ends o' ther 'arth, yer honnery, no-hearted coward thief," and Sunset Sam was nervously fingering his revolver-butt.

Captain Moonlight laughed and rode down into the trail, coming close up to the side on which Lucita was, while he called out:

"Jingo Jim, Jenks, Jim Jones, Jill, Jack, all of you!"

"Be ready to riddle Sunset Sam if he makes a move or utters another word."

And from here and there came responses of:

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Thus shut off, Sunset Sam dared not say more, for he knew how merciless the moonlighter captain was.

But to his credit be it said that he thought more of what would become of his passengers, should he be killed, than for himself.

"Now, madam, where are you from?"

"New York."

"And this wounded man at Miner's Roost is your husband?"

"He is, and if he dies you are his murderer."

"That troubles me not at all, for a life more or less on my hands does not rest heavily."

"What is your name, may I ask?"

"My name is Lucita Courtney Dillingham."

A cry broke from the lips of the robber captain, while the name he repeated:

"Lucita!"

The moon was at her back, yet shone full upon the masked face of the robber.

Still her eyes seemed to have pierced that mask of steel, for she said in a low tone:

"I felt that it was you."

The man seemed dazed for an instant, but then said, sternly:

"Hand me over your money and revolvers, madam, for my trade is to rob, and I spare no one."

"I must not be delayed, I must go on, so I obey, and—"

"Glory Hallelujah!" broke in Sunset Sam, as the notes of a bugle rung out on the crisp night air, and the sound of rapidly approaching hoofs was heard, coming up the trail behind the stage-coach.

"Curses! I have again to fly!"

"Take that, Sunset Sam, for your joy!"

And as the robber wheeled his horse he fired at the driver.

But his bullet flew past its target, and, with a laugh and oath commingled, Sunset Sam shouted:

"And you take that!"

But, to his amazement, Lucita struck up his arm and the bullet flew over the head of the retreating outlaw.

CHAPTER LV.

VELVET BILL TAKES THE TRAIL.

"VELVET BILL, I've got another favor to ask of you."

And the Indian Rider, on his run on which he carried the news to Parson Prim that the wounded stranger's wife was coming, drew rein at Jumping Off City.

"All right, Red Butterfly, name it," said Velvet Bill, in his pleasant way.

"Can you get off for to-day and to-night?"

"Oh, yes, if there is need to."

"You are a thorough frontiersman, I have heard, sir?"

"Oh, yes; I know the border well."

"And the trail to the fort?"

"Yes; I have been there several times."

"Will you go there for me on this run?"

"What's up, Red Butterfly?"

"I'll tell you, if you say you will go."

"I'll go."

"Well, sir, the stranger's wife is coming to Miner's Roost; I mean the gentleman who was wounded."

"She is coming by extra coach, and word came for Sunset Sam to wait for her, and he'll hardly leave before late to-night."

"Now, the news of her coming is known at the camps, and I feel sure that the moonlighters will be on the alert; so I wish to go back and be in the neighborhood of the coach when they halt it, if they do."

"You are cutting out a big job for yourself, Red Butterfly."

"I think I can master the situation, sir."

"Why not let me take a dozen men and go back as an escort for the coach?"

"No, that will not do; but I have help."

"Ah! then that is all right."

"I thought you were going to play it alone."

"No, sir."

"Well, what do you wish me to do?"

"To mount your horse and follow me out of the camps."

"I will meet you and send you by a safe trail."

"A safe trail between here and Fort Venture?" laughed Velvet Bill.

"Yes, sir, I'll do it," was the confident reply, and having had the promise of Velvet Bill to do as he asked, the Pony Rider went in to breakfast.

Soon after he mounted a fresh horse, his matchless Black Diamond, and rode on his way.

After going a short distance he came to the tree before referred to and reached up to the limb for the piece of paper he knew was there.

There was the red hand, with the graves at the end of the fingers, excepting this time it was the little finger that did not point toward a certain doom, as the graves seemed to indicate.

He replaced it and rode back to meet Velvet Bill, who soon came on at a rapid gallop, mounted upon a handsome bay horse.

"You are kind to oblige me in this, Velvet Bill."

"I am glad to do so, Red Rider."

"Here is my mail-and-express bag, and do you see yonder tree?"

"Yes."

"Take the trail leading to the left there."

"It will carry you miles out of your way, but take it, for death is on every other one."

"You know this?"

"I do."

"How?"

"I cannot tell you, but please obey me."

"I will."

"Give the pouches to Colonel Seeley only, for there are valuable packages along, and tell him you rode for me this trip, as I had to remain behind."

"Coming back to-night take the regular trail, for that will be the safe one."

"You understand?"

"I do."

"Then good-by, and keep the return mail at Jumping Off City until I come for it, for I won't be much behind."

"I'll do it, Red Rider."

"Luck to you."

"And the same to you, Velvet Bill."

With this the two parted, and Velvet Bill took the trail designated.

But the Pony Rider did not go back by way of Jumping Off City, for he branched off to the left where there was no trail visible.

It was night when he reached Miner's Roost, and he went through without halting, and stopped at the relay station beyond.

"Sandy, I wish to borrow every horse you can spare me," he said to the stock-tender at the station.

"Borrow my horses, Red Butterfly?" asked Sandy, in surprise.

"Yes, you have one of mine here, and six or eight stage horses."

"I has yours, and nine stage-horses, Red Rider."

"Well, I'll take my fresh mount and eight of your horses."

"What in thunder is yer goin' ter do, Red Rider, fer Sunset Sam, as yer told me, would be along late to-night, and he'll need four fresh horses."

"I know that; but what I intend to do with them will not tire them, and I guess I'll come back with Sam."

"Waal, take 'em, fer your word is law along ther Overland, Red Butterfly."

And so the Red Rider rode away from the station with eight horses in lead, while the stock-tender stood gazing after him in wonder at his strange request, and muttered to himself:

"Now that rattlin' Injun Rider have got some job set up along ther trail somewhere, and somebody's a-goin' ter get hurt."

CHAPTER LVI.

RED RIDER'S SUBSTITUTE.

THE Indian Rider had so persistently declined being ambushed and shot that the people at the fort had come to look upon him as a phenomenon and ceased to look for his death at the hands of the secret assassins of the trail.

He had some secret all knew, especially the scouts, by which he escaped the ambushers, and whatever it was he kept it srenely to himself.

He went and came as regularly as clock-work, and if he saw any dangers, met with any adventures, he never spoke of them unless closely questioned.

He always paid his respects to Alice Seeley after visiting her father, and the two seemed to have become great friends.

No attempt had been made to carry out the threat to make Alice Seeley the victim of the ambushers' hatred of the Pony Rider, though

several other placards of threats and warnings had been stuck up upon various parts of the stockade-walls, and were taken to Colonel Seeley when found.

Still the threats did not seem to worry Alice Seeley in the slightest degree.

But one day the fort was thrown into almost consternation by the cry:

"The Pony Express is coming, but it is not Red Butterfly!"

All were at once on the *qui vive*, and Alice Seeley grew very pale, while the brave colonel grew almost nervous.

"At last! at last!" he muttered, through his set teeth.

On came the Rider at a terrific pace, mounted upon a large bay that ran splendidly.

Nearer and nearer he drew until the Rider loomed up as a man in buckskin leggings stuck in cavalry-boots, a blue corduroy jacket, white silk shirt and black tie, in which glimmered a diamond, a black slouch hat pinned up in front with a miniature band of gold holding four aces.

A well-formed, handsome man with a dark, fearless face in which was much character, long golden hair, a blonde mustache and blue eyes that were intensely expressive.

About his waist was a red sash hiding a belt in which were two revolvers.

"It is Velvet Bill, the gambler," cried Paymaster Birney, and all gazed with admiration at the handsome fellow as he entered the stockade gate at full speed, raised his hat in salute, and drew rein before the quarters of Colonel Seeley, to whom he said, in his courtly way:

"Do not be alarmed, sir, for no harm has befallen your gallant Indian Rider, and I took his run at his request."

Colonel Seeley had heard much of the man before him, for the paymaster had told his story of him, and except that he was a professional gambler, and had been drawn into many personal conflicts, not a word unkind had been said of him.

So he greeted him cordially, and said:

"I am glad to learn Red Butterfly is all right, sir—but I beg pardon, for I do not know your name."

"Simply Velvet Bill, Colonel Seeley, for I aspire to no other."

"Well, sir, I have to thank you very much for riding Pony Express, and permit me to say that you are on time."

"I am glad to know that, sir."

"You gave us all a shock when we saw it was not the Red Butterfly, for he is very much of a favorite here."

"As he is along the whole line, sir; but Red Butterfly told me to say that there was a valuable Express to-day."

"Thank you; but may I ask what has detained him?"

"News came through, sir, to hold Sunset Sam's coach at Dismal Station, for an extra bearing the wife of the wounded stranger with Parson Prim at Miner's Roost, and Red Rider took the idea that the moonlighters might show themselves again on the trail, so got help to guard the coach, I believe."

"Just what the brave fellow should have done, and I am glad indeed that my poor friend Dillingham's wife has come, for he cannot live I learn."

"But now let me see to your comfort, sir."

"Permit me to extend the hospitality of my quarters to you, sir," said Paymaster Birney, coming forward and relieving Colonel Seeley from what might have been, for some men, a very awkward position.

"We have met before, Velvet Bill, and you befriended me, but if you do not recall when and where, I am not at liberty to explain to you under existing circumstances."

"But believe me your friend, and most glad am I to have you for my guest," said the paymaster as he led the gambler to his quarters.

"We have met before, sir, you say?" said Velvet Bill thoughtfully.

"We have, sir; but you could never recall me."

The gambler turned and looked the paymaster squarely in the eyes, while he said:

"You are mistaken, sir, for if I meet a man to speak to him one minute, I never forget him."

"Yes, I know you now, for your voice and your eyes betray you."

"It was a bold game you played and you won, though your poor friend was killed."

"By the gods of war! but you have placed me."

"Velvet Bill, you are a marvelous man, and I need hardly ask you to keep my secret."

"It is safe, sir, and now I can understand where the secret fund came from that has helped destitute miners and sick ones in Jumping Off City, and Sunset Sam has handled the money well, placing it where it would do most good."

"I am glad to meet a man like you, Paymaster Birney."

Velvet Bill enjoyed his dinner immensely, and as a number of officers dropped in who proposed a game of cards, he was persuaded to play, and as he rode away at night on his return run to Jumping Off City, he said to himself:

"Not a bad twenty-four hours' work, for I

have won a cool thousand; but they would play, those young officers, though I warned them that I was born under a lucky star."

CHAPTER LVII.

RED BUTTERFLY'S "PARDS."

"LORDY, ma'm, yer saved that cruel fiend's life," cried Sunset Sam, as his arm was struck up by Lucita Dillingham.

"I did not wish to see him die, sir, though he deserves death."

"Waal, tnet's so, and he mighty nigh tained up my toes; but here comes ther cavalry, though I didn't know any sojers was on ther trail."

As Sunset Sam spoke, full into the moonlight came a horseman, and behind him followed others.

"Lordy! it be Pony Rider Red Butterfly, and I are a murmurin' liar, ma'm, ef ther whole outfit of pilgrims with him hain't drunk."

It was no wonder that Sunset Sam so set the followers of Red Rider down, for they were reeling in their saddles, one or two lying over on the neck of the horse they rode.

"Waal, Red Butterfly, what in thunder is yer doin' here, when I thought yer was on yer ride along ther Fatal Trail at this time?"

"I came to look after you, Sunset Sam, as I knew you had a lady passenger and felt sure the moonlighters would hold you up," and the Indian raised his hat to the fair passenger, while he added with a laugh:

"What do you think of my pards, Sunset?"

"Waal, may I be hung for a horse-thief ef thar's a man in ther hull lot, now I gets my eyes onter 'em."

"What is they, Red Rider?"

"Some bags of leaves, old clothes, hats and boots I laid by on the trail and rigged up for men."

"I heard you go by my hiding-place, so followed, though not quite ready, and the result you see, for my pards would not all sit upright; but they served my purpose, and the bugle imitation I gave helped, too."

There sat Red Butterfly with his eight horses in lead, and upon their backs the dummies he had rigged up to make a show of horsemen, and at sight of them Sunset Sam burst forth in a roar of laughter, while Lucita could not help smiling at the grotesque sight.

At last Sam said:

"This underwidoal, ma'm, are Red Butterfly, the Pony Rider o' ther Fatal Trail."

"He hev got more grit than a whole comp'ny o' sogers, and, knowin' yer might need help, has played this leetle game on ther moonlighters."

"Lordy, but won't Cap'n Moonlight rave when he holds me up ag'in and I tells him how he and his gang run from one Injun, for he's a Injun, ma'm, clean through, though he's better than most pale-faces I has struck."

"I am glad to meet you, sir, and I certainly appreciate your kindness in coming to our rescue."

"I have considerable money along that I would have been most sorry to have been robbed of."

"I thank you, sir."

"I am glad I was near to help you, madam; but, Sam, how many moonlighters did you see to-night?"

"Only Cap'n Moonlight."

"No others?"

"No."

"Did you hear them?"

"Yes."

"My led horses got into a snarl, or I would have been here sooner, and I would, had I caught sight of Captain Moonlight, have given chase."

"Lor! but he did light out down that valley a-flyin', Red Butterfly; but whar is yer pouches?"

"Velvet Sam took them on for me, only do not speak of it, and I will come on to Jumping Off City to-morrow after them."

"Whar yer goin' now?"

"I think the moon is bright enough for me to follow Captain Moonlight."

"Better not, pard."

"I'll be cautious; and you take the horses on leading behind your coach to Sandy's Station, for I borrowed them from him."

"Sandy will die a-laffin' when he sees 'em, Red Rider."

"I hope not; but you had better push on now, Sam, for moments are precious."

Sunset Sam understood what Red Rider meant, and so did Lucita, for she said, quickly:

"Oh, yes; I must see him alive."

Thus urged, Sam helped Red Rider to secure the horses behind the coach and went on his way at a rapid pace, while the Indian youth turned off down the valley to follow the trail of the moonlighters.

"What a wonderful youth that seems to be," said Lucita, as they went on their way.

"He be the wonderment o' this country, ma'm."

"He is a full-blooded Indian you say, sir?"

"Yas, ma'm, but he's eddicated."

"So I noticed, and he neither talks or seems like an Indian."

"But he be a full-blood, I take it, ma'm."

"Red Butterfly you called him?"

"Yas, ma'm, that are the English of his Injun name which are Go-won-go."

"Well, I shall reward him most liberally for his services to me to-night."

"Let me tell yer, ma'm, beggin' yer pardon; but ef yer means ter give Red Butterfly money don't do it, for it will cut him deeper than a knife ter think you'd feel he could take it."

"No, ma'm, he are like myself, actin' fer human natur's sake and no pay."

"We gits our pay, and we'd stand up and die doin' our duty; but we do not want gold fer doin' what is right."

"I hope yer understands, ma'm, and hain't angry with me."

"No, indeed, my noble friend, I am glad you said what you did, for now I can appreciate both you and the Red Butterfly as you deserve to be."

"You are my true friends, not my servitors," and Lucita held out her hand; but Sam said:

"I'd shake, ma'm, but I might crush ther leetle thing."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE FAITHFUL WIFE.

HAVING learned that Sunset Sam was to await for the extra coach, bearing the stranger's wife, the denizens of Miner's Roost were not alarmed at his delay in coming in.

Sam had driven hard, making up a couple of hours' time, as he was anxious to get Mrs. Dillingham to the side of her dying husband; but it was a couple of hours after nightfall before his horn was heard awaking the echoes of the mountains.

Up he dashed, his team covered with foam, and Parson Prim and Landlord Jerry stood side by side before the door of Overland Lodge to meet the expected wife of the stranger.

She was aided from the box, while Sam said:

"Landlord Jerry, and Parson Prim, this are ther leddy, and may her comin' give ther wounded gent a new grip on life."

"How is he, sir?" asked Lucita, anxiously, of Parson Prim.

"Awaiting your coming most anxiously, madam."

"Will you go at once to him, or have supper at the Lodge first?"

"I will go at once, sir, and if the landlord will give quarters to my maid and servant-man, I will feel obliged, while I have a number of things brought for Mr. Dillingham's comfort."

Landlord Jerry took Jule and Robert in hand, while Parson Prim escorted the lady up to his cabin.

"She will come to me," the wounded man had said, and upon this the parson had made his cabin look as trim as possible, fitting up his second room for the wife and turning the shed outside into the kitchen.

He had also secured a miner who was a good cook and a nurse as well, and he had left him in charge while he went after Mrs. Dillingham.

The stage-born had reached the ears of the sufferer, and he had brightened up at once, when the parson said he would go after his wife.

"Tell me the truth, sir, about his case, for, see, I am strong, and prepared for the worst," said Lucita, as they ascended the spur to the cabin.

"He cannot live, madam."

"I felt that it was so," and she said no more.

They reached the cabin, and the parson gave a whistle and the miner nurse came out.

Then the parson stepped in and said:

"Your wife has arrived, Mr. Dillingham."

"And she is here?"

"Yes, I am here," and the faithful wife, who had braved so much to come to her dying husband, glided into the door which Parson Prim quickly closed behind her.

"We see sad sights in our life out here,"

Perry, said the parson, as he joined the nurse.

"Yes, sir; but the gent seemed so bright I think he may get well."

"No, it was hope at seeing his wife."

"He will fall rapidly now, and may not live through the night."

"Poor man."

Soon the wife came to the door and said:

"He is failing fast now, sir, and will you send for my maid, and Robert?"

"He also wishes the landlord to come and your presence also."

Perry was sent at once down to the hotel and Parson Prim entered the cabin.

He saw that his words had been but too true, for the wounded man was sinking rapidly.

The parson gave him a stimulant and he rallied and said:

"My good friend, get pen, ink, and paper and write as I dictate."

"Lose no time."

The parson obeyed, and the wounded man said:

"Write!"

"I am ready, sir."

"Being now at the point of death, and in full possession of my mental faculties, I hereby bequeath to my beloved wife, Lucita Courtney Dillingham,

my entire estate, whatsoever it may be, for her especial use, appointing her Executrix, without bond or reservation whatsoever."

"Is it written?"

"It is, sir."

"Read it."

The parson did so.

"Now, Parson Prim, I wish you to take charge of that paper, as soon as it is signed, sealed and witnessed, and send it to my attorney, whose address now write on the back of it."

"You will do this for me?"

"I will, sir."

"And you must witness it too."

"And more, before the arrival of the others I wish to tell you to pay my faithful nurse, Perry, one thousand dollars out of the money you hold of mine, as much more to the driver, Sunset Sam, and a like amount to the Indian Pony Rider."

"Pardon me, Mr. Dillingham, but neither Sunset Sam nor Red Butterfly would accept a dollar, sir, as I well know."

"But you will allow me to leave you a legacy, out of the money you hold of—"

"Not a dollar, sir, though I appreciate your kindness— Ah, here they come!"

The door opened and Perry ushered into the room Landlord Jerry, Jule and Robert.

The dying man gave his hand to each in silence, then said:

"Read my last will and testament, Parson Prim."

It was done.

"Give me the pen."

In a bold hand he signed it and handed the pen to Parson Prim.

Then the landlord's came next, then Julia Hassan and Robert Bentz.

"It is done," said the dying man, and a look from the parson caused all to retire and leave the faithful wife alone with her husband.

"Come!" she said, an hour afterward, and Parson Prim entered the room and heard his last words:

"Be good to her, parson—good-by."

CHAPTER LIX.

A MYSTERIOUS DEPARTURE.

THE news of the death of the stranger spread through the camps of Miner's Roost, and the good-hearted souls stopped work the next morning, dressed up in their best, and prepared to go to the funeral, which was to be an event.

Parson Prim had left Jule with Mrs. Dillingham, Perry and Robert with the body, and then gone the rounds of the saloons and asked, as an especial favor to the sorrowing widow, the woman in their midst, if they would not close their doors.

Not one refused, and never before had the sun risen upon such a Sabbath-looking day as Miner's Roost presented.

There had been a rude coffin made and covered with black cloth, one of Mrs. Dillingham's dresses, which Jule had given the parson, and a grave had been dug upon the spur of the mountain, near the cabin and in a beautiful spot.

In silence the miners came, and with uncovered heads, each one as he passed the sorrowing woman seated before the cabin making her a low bow of sympathy.

Then the coffin was raised by the six pallbearers whom the parson had selected and borne toward the grave.

Parson Prim followed with head uncovered, reciting from memory in his deep, rich voice:

"I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Behind him came the widow, leaning upon Landlord Jerry's arm, Jule and Robert followed, and then Perry, the faithful nurse, while the miners, several hundred in number, grouped in silence about the grave.

The coffin was lowered by gentle hands to its last resting-place, and stepping forward Landlord Jerry took up a shovelful of earth and let it fall upon the coffin as Parson Prim repeated the saddest of words:

"Thus do we commit thy body to the grave, earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Amen!"

Then suddenly, like a heavenly voice, there burst forth upon the air in tones of sweetest melody the words:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

It was the widowed woman who sung, and all stood spellbound at the scene, the melody, the singer.

Alone she sung the first verse, but as she began the second a voice joined in, clear, resonant and full of music.

It was the parson, and one by one others joined in, until, with a mighty roar of melody, like some grand organ, hundreds of voices went echoing along the mountains and valleys of that vast wilderness the words:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

When the wave of song had died away, the parson threw into the grave a shovelful of earth, and handed the shovel to Landlord Jerry.

He did likewise, Perry followed, and then, one by one, the miners passed in file, each taking

the shovel and throwing in the earth, and then gliding away in silence toward the widow and howling low once more in sympathy.

She held forth her hand when Perry came, and then, one by one, each hard palm grasped the little one extended to it, while from lips from which curses rather than prayers had more often fallen, came again and again the words:

"God bless you!"

At last all had gone away, and the widow was alone by the grave.

It was a fitting burial for that wild scene, a laying away in the grave that a monarch might have envied.

It was a burial which could have been seen nowhere else, and so Lucita Dillingham thought and felt.

A widow, yes, there in the frontier wilds, with her faithful Jule the only other woman within many a long mile.

But she was not alone.

"No, not here, Jule, are we alone.

"All these noble men are our friends.

"God bless all of them."

That night in the cabin on the Spur, Lucita talked over with the parson what was best to be done.

He asked if she would go to the fort, but she preferred to start upon her return when Sunset Sam came on his eastward trip.

She wrote a letter to Colonel Seeley, telling him of her husband's death, thanking him for his kind visit to him, and making known all that Parson Prim, Sunset Sam and Red Butterfly had done for her.

This letter she gave to Parson Prim to deliver, and with Jule and Robert as her companions, started upon the return trip, again mounting to the box with Sunset Sam.

Every miner in the camp was gathered at the Overland Lodge to see her leave and wish her good-luck, and they stood with uncovered heads as the coach rolled away when they went forth in one rousing cheer, for the young and beautiful widow had won the hearts of each and every one of them.

"Now, open up ther lickin' dices, pards, so we kin celebrate, fer this goin' without rum fer twenty-four hours be awful harrowin' to our narves," said a miner, and he but gave expression to the feeling of all, and a wild orgie was begun in Miner's Roost which never ended until there were several men killed.

But when they looked for the parson for another burial scene he was nowhere to be found.

He had most mysteriously disappeared, and a note left in his cabin for Landlord Jerry stated that he had departed to return no more, and grief at the parson's going was seized upon as reason enough for a renewal of the orgie, which was accordingly entered upon with the greatest relish by many men glad of a chance to "celebrate."

CHAPTER LX.

SAM'S INTERESTED LISTENER.

ON the way back to Dismal City Lucita urged Sunset Sam to talk to her.

She wished to hear his voice, to drive away her own painful thoughts.

So Sunset Sam, only too happy to oblige in that line, entered upon his favorite theme, the Indian Rider, and finding that his listener seemed deeply interested, went on to tell all about the Indian youth.

"I may be a-givin' out secrets, ma'm—but I guess its miss now yer is a widder and likely ter marry ag'in, so I'll jist call yer miss.

"Yer see, I may be a-givin' out secrets, but ter tell you a secret is like lockin' it up, so I'll tell yer what I knows.

"Yer see, ther Pony Rider come and took ther trail when nobody else w'd do it, and I at last found out, for we is ther best o' pards, that he were a-workin' fer bigger game then Pony Ridin'.

"That game were ter secure his adopted father from ther Red Buzzards.

"Ther Injun boy, as I understood it, were with his Injun pa one day, and he were a Mohawk chief who had been stolen when a lad by the Sioux.

"He got ter be a big chief, and yet ther Sioux kinder doubted him, 'cause he helped the pale-faces once.

"So they drove him and his kid from ther tribe, and they become wanderers.

"While a-wanderin' one day they heerd shots and seen a man at bay ag'in' road-agents.

"So they sails in ter help him out, and done it, though ther chief were kilt, and dyin' left his boy to ther white man, who vowed ter keer fer him.

"Ther white man were a miner returnin' home rich, ter marry a sweetheart out East, so Red Rider told me, and he tuk him with him and put him ter school.

"Then he went ter get his sweetheart, and found she had skipped off with another feller what was rich, like they all will do, miss, beggin' yer pardon.

"So he jist went to his home, clean done up, and misfortin' followed him arter a few years,

for ther banks whar he had his money bu'sted, and he come West ag'in ter go to minin'.

"But his old foe, Quantrel—"

"Quantrel!"

"Yas, miss, and I don't wonder yer is scared at ther name; but he jist determined ter git ther miner, thinkin' he knew of a mine, and he tuk him from my coach and left him fer dead.

"But Parson Prim, who are a dandy, rescued him and took him to his cabin; but ther poor feller hed been wounded in ther head, and it made him mad."

"Poor man."

"Well, miss, that Quantrel kidnapped him from ther parson's cabin, and soon arter it were that ther Indian Rider came out here.

"He knowed ther country well, and he come ter ride Pony Express and ther same time ter play detective.

"He hed left school ter rescue his adopted father, and durn me, miss, ef he didn't do it, he and ther parson, aided by Buffalo Bill and ther sojers.

"Waal, they thoughted that Quantrel war dead, but Red Butterfly says he hain't, for his adopted pa were tuk East and put in a mad-house, and somebody stole him from thar and Pony Rider tuk ther trail, and thet be what he are doin' here now—a-lookin' fer ther Mad Miner."

"He is a noble fellow, indeed, and I sincerely hope he may find him, for I suppose the outlaws are keeping the Mad Miner hidden, hoping to force from him the secret of his mine."

"Thet's jist it; but from what Red Butterfly tells me o' Yankee Dan, his real name being Daniel Darwin—"

"Daniel Darwin!" cried the woman, excitedly clutching the arm of Sunset Sam, who, really startled, answered:

"Yes, miss; thet's what Red Rider called him."

"See here, sir; when we get to Dismal City I will place in your hands my check for ten thousand dollars, which will be payable to the one who rescues Daniel Darwin from the outlaws."

"Yes, I will give more, so you see to it that the money is earned by some one."

"Then yer know'd him, miss?"

"Knew him?"

"I was the one he came back to claim as his wife years ago; but they had forced me to marry another, a noble man, whom I have just seen buried."

"But this I tell to you only, Sunset Sam, and I beg you to rescue from the outlaws poor Daniel Darwin."

"Ther Injun Rider will git thet money, miss," said Sunset Sam, impulsively, and Lucita murmured:

"Heaven grant he may!"

CHAPTER LXI.

TRACKED.

THE Indian Rider was not back on time to Jumping Off City, as he had promised Velvet Bill he would be.

The day passed, and not until late at night did he come in, and then, with no explanation of his delay, he thanked Velvet Bill for his kindness, mounted a fresh horse and departed upon his return to Dismal City.

He left a note for Parson Prim at Miner's Roost, and then skipped ahead of Sunset Sam's coach with his passenger.

Arriving at Dismal City, he gave up his mail and said:

"Boss, I am going on a hunt for my four days off.

"If I don't get back on time, send the pouches through by Sunset Sam to Jumping Off City, and I will head him off there and get them to the fort on time.

"If I am not there when Sunset Sam gets in, ask him to hand this letter to Velvet Bill, the gambler."

"But, where are you going, Red Butterfly?"

"On a hunt, sir, as I said—a man-hunt," he muttered to himself, as he turned away.

Soon after he mounted his best horse, and with a haversack of food and a couple of blankets, besides taking his repeating-rifle, he set off on his trail.

He did not follow the Overland Trail, but bore away to the left, leaving Miner's Roost several miles away from the nearest point he passed to it.

Following a course he seemed to have his mind made up regarding, he halted at Rapid Run and went into camp in a position where he could see the trail, yet not be himself seen from it.

There he passed the night, and the next morning, while cooking breakfast, he saw a horseman ride along the trail.

Instantly he uttered a sound like the cooing of a dove and the horseman halted.

Repeating the sound the Indian Rider beheld the horseman coming toward him.

A minute after he rode up and dismounted.

"Well, parson, I am glad I did not have to wait long."

"I came just as soon as I started that poor lady upon her return home, Go-won-go; but now tell me what is up."

"You are ready for the trail, sir?"

"Yes, all ready and willing."

"Then after we have eaten breakfast we will start."

"No one else?"

"We do not need any one else, parson, as you will see."

The two ate a hearty breakfast together, and then mounting their horses rode away, the Indian Rider leading down the valley.

No halt was made until late in the afternoon, and then they went into camp in a canyon.

"Now, parson, I'll tell you the whole story."

"Velvet Bill rode my run to the fort and I came in search of the moonlighters."

"I followed the trail of Captain Moonlight after he ran from my coming, the night the lady was along, and I tracked him to his den."

"It is the very place for a retreat, a rock island in the middle of a torrent, and it takes a good horse to get there."

"He rides in above the island and swims his horse down to it, making a landing which cannot be seen from the shore."

"In the same way he leaves the island, landing below."

"The island is but a couple of acres in size, but there is plenty of grass and wood there, so he is all right."

"Have you been on the island?"

"I have."

"I jumped in and swam down to it and was there an hour."

"Then I left, mounted my horse and went to Jumping Off City to get my pouches from Velvet Bill."

"And the band numbers how many?"

"The moonlighters number but one, Captain Moonlight himself."

"Impossible!"

"It is true, for I suspected this, as I could find but one trail always, and so watched."

"But others were with him?"

"Not another one, for he is a ventriloquist."

"Ah!"

"It is so."

"Then he would call a name and answer himself?"

"That is it."

"This is a great discovery."

"He has on the island three persons with him."

"Three?"

"Yes; one is my adopted father."

"Ah!"

"Another is the red-headed fraud who pretended to be an inspector, and who came West with him."

"Yes."

"The third is my man, Faro Frank, whom Red Head rescued, but never got the key of his irons, for he is still manacled."

"You have seen all this?"

"I have, and we will go there to-night."

"Good!"

"There is a cavern in the island, and this Captain Moonlight, who is Quantrel—"

"I was sure of it after all you told me."

"Well, he uses the cavern as his quarters, and has his booty there."

"Red Head, you said, bought a keg of powder in Miner's Roost, and I saw it there in the mouth of the cave, and a lot of plunder."

"Under a shelter near by, my father and the two villains stay, and the horses are allowed to go free, for they cannot be seen from the shores and cannot get off the island."

"Now that is the situation."

"Well, we can master it, if we can get there and keep our weapons dry."

"We must make a float now to carry us there on."

"Is Quantrel there?"

"If he is not, he will return there."

"True, he is our game," was the stern response of the parson.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE OUTLAW'S TOMB.

LEAVING their horses upon the shore, securely fastened, the Indian Rider and the parson stepped upon the raft which they had built, and with long poles in hand embarked upon their perilous voyage, soon after nightfall.

The Indian steered, and the landing-place was reached in safety and the raft made fast.

A light glimmered upon the rocks above, and making their way into the little vale, they beheld a picturesque scene.

There sat the moonlighter in the cavern entrance.

He was no longer masked, and the face of Frank Courtney, alias Quantrel, was plainly revealed.

He was counting over his gold.

Under a shelter not far distant sat a man looking listlessly into the fire.

He was in double irons.

The man was the mad miner.

Lying near him was another man whose hands were manacled.

It was Faro Frank, the Red Rider's escaped prisoner, whose manacles the chief had not yet been able to remove.

Asleep near the fire was a burly man with red hair.

He it was who had been the butler in Lucita's home, and the ally of Courtney in his deviltries.

Suddenly Red Rider and the parson called out in chorus:

"Hands up, Quantrell!
"You are surrounded!"

A wild yell broke from the lips of the robber, and he sprang back into the cavern and began to fire recklessly.

The red-headed man also gave a cry of alarm and sprang to his feet, revolver in hand, but to fall dead under Parson Prim's fire.

Faro Frank groaned and yelled for mercy.

The mad miner sat wholly unmoved.

Suddenly the robber chief's horse dashed in fright by the cavern, from where he was feeding among the rocks, his hoofs struck the keg of powder, knocking it into the fire, and almost instantly followed a terrific explosion and a heavy fall.

Rocks flew in all directions, but none without were hurt.

But Quantrell?

The whole front of the cavern had fallen in, forming a solid mass of rocks over the entrance, and Parson Prim said impressively:

"Behold, Red Rider!

"He has made his own tomb!"

"At last! yes, at last!" said Red Butterfly, in a low voice.

Then with a bound he sprang toward his adopted father.

But the mad miner did not know him.

CHAPTER LXIII:

CONCLUSION.

As Red Butterfly had said, he got into Jumping Off City in time to catch Sunset Sam with his mail.

But he was not alone, for with him was Parson Prim, the mad miner and Faro Frank as a prisoner, the body of Jenks have been buried on the island.

Then there were a score of horses in lead, and the party were bound for Fort Venture.

When Sunset Sam arrived, he was given back his horses stolen by Captain Moonlight, and the whole story of the capture was told and cheered to the echo.

Then the party moved on to the fort, and such a welcome as they met there is beyond description.

"But who would have ever known you, Powell, in that rig?" said Colonel Seeley, turning to the pretended "Parson Prim," whom the reader ere this has recognized as Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout.

As no one now doubted the fate of the moonlight chief, Faro Frank, on the evidence against him, was at once sentenced to be hanged, and the sentence, I may say just here, was faithfully carried out.

And the mad miner?

He was carried to the surgeon's special quarters, for Frank Powell had said:

"A surgical operation will cure him, I feel assured."

And the surgeon set to work to verify his words by removing the pressure of the skull upon the brain.

It was a perfect success, for Daniel Darwin's reason returned to him, but all since the time when he had received the wound was a blank to him, his suffering, his madness and all.

After a month spent at the fort, during which time Red Butterfly rode Pony Express, Daniel Darwin drew the map of the secret mine, discovered by Go-won-go's father, and which he had destroyed for fear he might be captured by road-agents.

Straight to the mine they went, and it was found to be rich beyond their greatest expectations.

But the miner left others to work it for him, while he returned to the East, taking Go-won-go with him.

And before they left Colonel Seeley asked:

"But what of the Fatal Trail, Go-won-go?"

"I must confess, sir, that among those outlaws was an Indian brave who had known me in childhood, and recognizing me, met me on the trail one day.

"From that day on he left me a warning of the trails ambushed, and when I came through Jumping Off City, Velvet Bill told me that the ambushers of the trail had gone; but why, or how he knew it, he would not say."

And so the miner and Red Butterfly started East, and going on Sunset Sam's coach, Daniel Darwin heard from him the story told him by Lucita Dillingham, and the reward she had offered for his rescue.

It is needless to say that Daniel Darwin forgave the past and lived in the happy present in the love of the one whom he believed he had forever lost, while Go-won-go made her home with them—yet no longer known as a youth, for though Alice Seeley, Surgeon Powell, and a couple more at the fort knew the secret, no one else suspected that the daring Red Rider of the Overland was a woman.

THE END.

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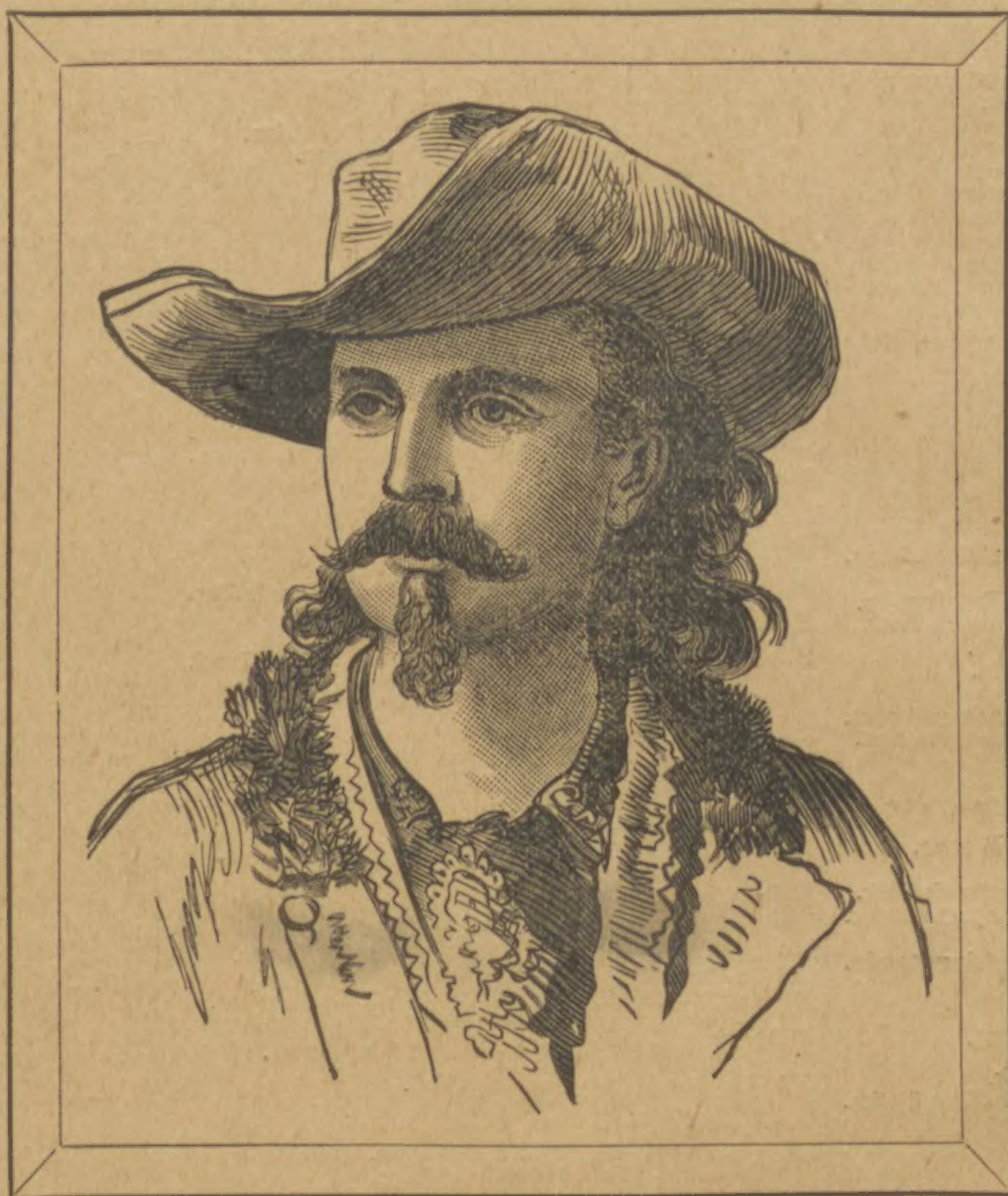
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